

G 3456

T8 C6

Copy 1



0 002 332 657 7



PG 3456
.T8 C6
Copy 1

THE MOSCOW ART
THEATRE SERIES
OF RUSSIAN PLAYS

DIRECTION OF MORRIS GEST

Edited by OLIVER M. SAYLER

VOLUME IV

THE
THREE SISTERS

A DRAMA IN FOUR ACTS

BY

ANTON TCHEKHOFF

Chekhov, Anton Pavlovich

English translation by
JENNY COVAN

NEW YORK
BRENTANOS
PUBLISHERS

COPYRIGHT, 1922, BY MORRIS GEST
All rights reserved



© Cl A 697384

JAN 13 1923
M.I.

PG 3456
T8 C6

INTRODUCTION

Like "The Cherry Orchard," which it preceded to the stage by three years, Anton Tchekhoff's "The Three Sisters" is a veracious and illuminating cross section of Russian life among the provincial intelligentsia prior to the Revolution of 1905. Traces of this dull, drab, monotonous existence, in which smoldering passion flares up fitfully, survived that upheaval and as before became one of the causes of the contemporary Revolution. Apparently, that life is obliterated to-day, and so even if "The Three Sisters" had no compelling human appeal, it would be invaluable as an artist's eye-witness account of a departed epoch.

But it has a compelling human appeal, with its recurrent refrain of pensive ambition thwarted at every turn, and thwarted, too, by characteristics existing alongside the ambition rather than by outside influences.

That appeal will be apparent to the reader and in highly intensified degree to the spectator of the Moscow Art Theatre's searchingly intimate interpretation of the play. It is interesting to recount here the human side of the composition and production of "The Three Sisters."

This deeply moving drama of suppressed longings was the first of Tchekhoff's plays to be written expressly for the theatre which had found its own function through opening for him a channel on the Russian stage. "The Sea-Gull" had merely been rescued from previous failure in Petrograd. "Uncle Vanya" had been snatched by Stanislavsky from timid and over-fastidious hands at the Small Imperial Theatre. "The Three Sisters," on the other hand, was composed with Stanislavsky and his artists particularly in mind as its interpreters, but only after extraordinary proof to the playwright that the Moscow Art Theatre was his legitimate outlet.

Ill health had kept Tchekhoff in the Crimea, pre-

venting him from seeing the Art Theatre's productions of "The Sea-Gull" and "Uncle Vanya." He only half-believed the rumors of their success. To convince him, therefore, and to elicit the desired new manuscript, the entire company journeyed southward at the close of the Moscow season in the spring of 1900 and gave special performances in Sevastopol and Yalta for Tchekhoff's benefit.

"The Three Sisters" was written at Yalta in the summer of 1900, rewritten in Moscow in early autumn, read to the actors for the first time in the presence of the author, placed in rehearsal and produced February 13 (our calendar), 1901. During rehearsals, Tchekhoff fled with misgivings to Nice and as the date of the premiere approached, he concealed his whereabouts in Naples, without the faintest hope that the play would achieve the success it did.

Still, to this period belongs the most intimate relationship achieved between playhouse and playwright. Tchekhoff's advice was sought and given on matters pertaining to the rest of the repertory. And it was at this time that the company's leading actress, Mme. Knipper, became his wife.

Some one has said that in his methods as a producer, Stanislavsky has heeded the dicta of Diderot: "No emotion can be interpreted with success except in a moderate and chastened form"; and "Restraint is essential in all artistic interpretation." Restraint, minimization, the loosening of the tension and the sharpening of the attention — these, assuredly, are the secrets not only of the producer of "The Three Sisters" but of its author, as well.

It is significant to note in conclusion that to-day, twenty-two years after its first performance, five of the most important rôles in "The Three Sisters" are still played by the same actors who originally embodied them and found their inspiration in the unobtrusive but penetrating guidance of the playwright himself.

THE EDITOR.

CAST OF CHARACTERS.

ANDREI SERGEEVITCH PROZOROFF.

NATALIA IVANOVNA (NATASHA) —

His fiancée, later his wife.

OLGA

MASHA

IRINA

} *His sisters.*

FYODOR ILYITCH KULIGIN —

High school teacher; married to Masha.

ALEXANDER IGNATEIEVITCH VERSHININ —

Lieutenant-Colonel in charge of a battery.

NIKOLAI LVOVITCH TUZENBACH —

Baron, Lieutenant in the army.

VASSILY VASSILIEVITCH SOLYONY — *Captain.*

IVAN ROMANOVITCH TCHEBUTIKIN — *Army doctor.*

ALEXEI PETROVITCH FEDOTIK — *Second lieutenant.*

VLADIMIR CARLOVITCH RODE — *Second lieutenant.*

FERAPONT —

Door-keeper at local council offices, an old man.

ANFISA — *Nurse.*

The action takes place in a provincial town.

ACT ONE.

In Prozoroff's home. A sitting-room with pillars; behind is seen a large living-room. It is midday, outside the sun is shining brightly. In the living-room the table is being laid for lunch.

Olga, in the regulation blue dress of a teacher at a girl's high school, is walking about correcting exercise books; Masha, in a black dress, her hat in her lap, sits and reads a book; Irina, in white, stands at one side, deep in thought.

OLGA. Father died just a year ago, on the fifth of May, your birthday, Irina. It was very cold and it snowed. I thought I would never survive it, and you fainted dead away. Now a year has gone by and we are already thinking of it without pain, and you are dressed in white and you seem cheerful. [*Clock strikes twelve*] And the clock struck just the same way then. [*Pause*] I remember that there was music at the funeral, and they fired a volley across the grave. He was a Brigadier-General yet there were few people present. Of course, it was raining, raining hard, and snowing.

IRINA. Why recall it?

[Baron Tuzenbach, Tchebutikin and Solyony appear by the table in the living-room, behind the pillars]

OLGA. It's so warm to-day that we can keep the windows open, though the birch trees are not yet in flower. Father was put in command of a brigade, and he left

Moscow with us eleven years ago. I remember perfectly that it was early May and everything in Moscow was in bloom. It was warm, too, everything was bathed in sunshine. Eleven years have gone, and I remember everything as if it were only yesterday. Oh, God! This morning when I awakened and saw the glorious sunshine and the budding spring, my heart filled with joy, and I longed so much to go home.

TCHEBUTIKIN. Will you bet on it?

TUZENBACH. Oh, nonsense.

[*Masha, lost in reverie over her book, whistles softly*]

OLGA. Don't whistle, Masha. How can you! [*Pause*] With teaching High School every day and giving lessons every evening, I have headaches all the time. Strange thoughts come to me, as if I were already an old woman. And really, during the four years that I have been working here, I have felt as if every day my strength and youth were being squeezed out of me, drop by drop. And only one desire grows and gains in strength. . . .

IRINA. To go to Moscow. To sell the house, leave everything here, and go to Moscow . . .

OLGA. Yes! To Moscow, and as soon as possible.

[*Tchebutikin and Tuzenbach laugh*]

IRINA. I expect brother will become a professor, but still, he won't wish to live here. Poor Masha is the only drawback.

OLGA. Masha will come to Moscow every year, for the whole summer.

[*Masha is whistling gently*]

IRINA. God willing, everything will be arranged.

[*Looks out of the window*] It's nice out to-day. I don't know why I'm so gay. I remembered this morning it was my birthday, and suddenly I felt so happy and thought of my childhood days, when mother was still with us. What glorious thoughts I had, what thoughts!

OLGA. You're all radiance to-day, I've never seen you look so lovely. And Masha is pretty, too. Andrei wouldn't be bad-looking, if he hadn't taken on so much weight; it does spoil his appearance. But I've grown old and very thin; I suppose it's because I get angry with the girls at school. To-day I'm free. I'm at home. I haven't a headache, and I feel younger than I did yesterday. I'm only twenty-eight. . . . All's well, God is everywhere, but it seems to me that if only I were married and could stay at home all day, it would be even better. [*Pause*] I would love my husband.

TUZENBACH [*to Solyony*] I'm tired of listening to your rot. [*Entering the sitting-room*] I forgot to say that Vershinin, our new Lieutenant-Colonel of artillery, is coming to see us to-day. [*Sits down at the piano*]

OLGA. Well — I'm very glad.

IRINA. Is he old?

TUZENBACH. Not very. Forty or forty-five, at the most. [*Plays softly*] He seems rather a good sort. He's certainly no fool, only he likes to hear himself talk.

IRINA. Is he interesting?

TUZENBACH. Oh, he's all right, but there's his wife, his mother-in-law, and two daughters. This is his second wife. He pays visits and tells everybody that he has a wife and two daughters. He'll tell you so, too, when he

comes here. His wife is half-witted, she wears her hair in a braid down her back and talks a blue streak. She philosophizes, and tries to commit suicide frequently, apparently in order to annoy her husband. In his place I would have left her long ago, but he bears up patiently, and only complains.

SOLYONY [*enters with Tchebutikin from the living-room*] With one hand I can lift only fifty-four pounds, but with both hands I can lift 180, or even 200. From this I conclude that two men are not twice as strong as one, but three times, perhaps even more. . . .

TCHEBUTIKIN [*reads a newspaper as he walks*] If your hair is coming out . . . take an ounce of naphthaline and half a bottle of alcohol . . . dissolve and use daily. . . . [*Makes a note in his pocket diary*] I'll make a note of it! [*To Solyony*] Listen. You cork the bottle well, push a glass tube through the cork. . . . Then you take a small quantity of . . .

IRINA. Ivan Romanovitch, dear Ivan Romanovitch!

TCHEBUTIKIN. Well, what is it, my dear little girl?

IRINA. Why am I so happy to-day? I feel as if I were sailing under a great blue sky with huge white birds around me. Why is that? Why?

TCHEBUTIKIN [*kisses her hands, tenderly*] My white bird. . . .

IRINA. When I awoke this morning and got up and washed, everything was like an open book to me, and I seemed to grasp the meaning of life. Dear Ivan Romanovitch, I understand everything. Every one must toil in the sweat of his brow, whoever he may be. In this alone

is the aim and object of his life, his happiness, his ambition. How splendid it is to be a workman who gets up at daybreak and breaks stones in the street, or a shepherd, or a schoolmaster, who teaches children, or a railroad mechanic. . . . My God, if I can't be a man who works, I would rather be an ox, or a horse, or any work animal, than a young woman who wakes up at twelve o'clock, has her coffee in bed, and then spends two hours dressing. . . . Oh, it's awful! Sometimes I crave work as a thirsty man craves water on a hot day. And if I don't get up early in the future and work, Ivan Romanovitch, then you may refuse me your friendship.

TCHEBUTIKIN [*tenderly*] I agree, I agree. . . .

OLGA. Father used to make us get up at seven. Now Irina wakes at seven and lies and meditates about something till nine at least. And she looks so serious! [*Laughs*]

IRINA. You're so used to me as a little girl that it seems queer to you that I should ever be serious. I'm twenty!

TUZENBACH. I can understand that craving for work. God! I've never worked in my life. I was born in chilly, lazy Petersburg, of a family that never needed to work nor ever had to worry. I remember when I came home from my regiment, a footman had to pull off my boots while I fidgeted and my mother gazed at me in adoration and wondered when others looked on disapprovingly. They shielded me from work; they almost succeeded, almost! The day of reckoning is here. Something formidable is threatening us; a strong, cleansing storm is gather-

ing; it is coming nearer and nearer; it will soon sweep our world clean of laziness, indifference, prejudice against work, and wretched boredom. I shall soon work, and within twenty-five or thirty years, every one will work! Every one!

TCHEBUTIKIN. I shan't work.

TUZENBACH. You do not matter.

SOLYONY. In twenty-five years' time, we shall all be dead, thank the Lord. In two or three years a stroke will carry you off, or else I'll grow impatient and blow your brains out, my angel.

[*Takes a scent-bottle out of his pocket and sprays his chest and hands*]

TCHEBUTIKIN [*laughs*] It's quite true, I have never done anything in my life. After I left the university I never moved a finger or opened a book, I just read the papers. . . . [*Takes another newspaper out of his pocket*] Here we are. . . . According to the papers there used to be a writer, named Dobroluboff, but what he wrote — I don't know . . . God only knows . . . [*Rapping is heard from the floor below*] There. . . . They're calling me downstairs, somebody's come to see me. I'll be back in a minute . . . won't be long . . . [*Exit hurriedly, scratching his beard*]

IRINA. He's up to something.

TUZENBACH. Yes, he looked so pleased as he went out that I'm pretty certain he'll bring you a present in a moment.

IRINA. How unpleasant!

OLGA. Yes, it's awful. He's always doing silly things.

MASHA. "A green oak stands by the sea.
A chain of gold around it . . .
A chain of gold around it . . ."

[*Masha rises and hums softly*]

OLGA. You're not very cheerful to-day, Masha.
[*Masha hums, putting on her hat*] Where are you off to?

MASHA. Home.

IRINA. That's odd. . . .

TUZENBACH. Leaving the birthday party?

MASHA. It doesn't matter. I'll come back in the evening. Good-bye, dear. [*Kisses Irina*] Once more let me wish you many happy returns! In the old days when father was alive, every time we had a birthday, thirty or forty officers used to come, and there was plenty of noise and fun, and to-day there's only a man and a half, and it's as quiet as the grave. I'm off . . . I'm out of sorts to-day, and gloomy, so don't you mind me. [*Laughs through her tears*] We'll talk later on. Good-by for the present, my dear; I'll go somewhere.

IRINA [*displeased*] You are queer. . . .

OLGA [*crying*] I understand you, Masha.

SOLYONY. When a man talks philosophy, well, it is philosophy or at any rate sophistry; but when a woman, or two women, talk philosophy — it's all nonsense.

MASHA. What do you mean by that, you awful creature?

SOLYONY. Oh, nothing. You jump on me before I can say Booh! [*Pause.*]

MASHA [*angrily, to Olga*] Stop bawling!

[*Enter Anfisa and Ferapont with a cake*]

ANFISA. This way, my dear. Come in, your feet are clean. [*To Irina*] The District Council, from Mikhail Ivanitch Protopopoff sends this cake.

IRINA. Thank you. Please thank him. [*Takes the cake*]

FERAPONT. What?

IRINA [*louder*] Please thank him.

OLGA. Give him some pie, nurse. Ferapont, go, you'll get some pie.

FERAPONT. What?

ANFISA. Come on, grand-dad, Ferapont Spiridonitch. Come on. [*Exeunt*]

MASHA. I don't like this Mikhail Potapitch or Ivanitch, Protopopoff. We should not invite him here.

IRINA. I never asked him.

MASHA. That's right.

[*Enter Tchebutikin followed by a soldier carrying a silver samovar; there are exclamations of astonishment and dissatisfaction*]

OLGA [*covers her face with her hands*] A samovar! That's terrible! [*Exit into the living-room, walks up to table*]

IRINA. My dear Ivan Romanovitch, what are you doing!

TUZENBACH [*laughs*] I told you so!

MASHA. Ivan Romanovitch, you are absolutely shameless!

TCHEBUTIKIN. My dear ones, you are all I have, everything I care for in all the world. I'll soon be sixty.

I'm an old man, a lonely insignificant old man. The one good thing about me is my love for you, and if it hadn't been for that, I would have died long ago. . . . [*To Irina*] My dear little girl, I've known you since you were born, I've carried you in my arms. . . . I loved your dead mother. . . .

MASHA. But why such expensive presents?

TCHEBUTIKIN [*angrily, through his tears*] Expensive presents . . . You should be scolded! . . . [*To the orderly*] Take the samovar in there . . . [*teasing*] Expensive presents!

[*The Orderly goes into the living-room with the samovar*]

ANFISA [*enters and crosses stage*] My dear, a strange Colonel is calling! He's taken off his coat already, children, he's coming in here. Irina darling, you'll be a nice and polite little girl, won't you? . . . [*Going into living-room*] It's long past the lunch hour. . . . Oh Lord . . . [*Exit*]

TUZENBACH. It must be Vershinin. [*Enter Vershinin*] Lieutenant-Colonel Vershinin!

VERSHININ [*to Masha and Irina*] I have the honor of introducing myself, my name is Vershinin. I am very glad that I've met you at last. Why — you are grown up! Dear! Dear!

IRINA. Please sit down. We're very glad you came.

VERSHININ [*gayly*] I am glad, so very glad! But there are three sisters, surely. I remember — three little girls. I forget your faces, but your father, Colonel Prozoroff, used to have three little girls; I remember that

perfectly; I saw them with my own eyes. How time does fly! Oh, dear, how it does fly!

TUZENBACH. Alexander Ignateievitch comes from Moscow.

IRINA. From Moscow? Are you from Moscow?

VERSHININ. Yes, from Moscow. Your late father used to command a battery there, and I was an officer in the same brigade. [*To Masha*] I seem to remember your face a little.

MASHA. I don't remember you.

IRINA. Olga! Olga! [*Shouts into the living-room*] Olga! Come here! [*Olga enters from living-room*] Lieutenant-Colonel Vershinin comes from Moscow, it appears.

VERSHININ. You are doubtless Olga Sergeievna, the eldest, and you are Maria . . . and you Irina, the youngest. . . .

OLGA. So you come from Moscow?

VERSHININ. Yes. I went to school in Moscow and entered the army there; I served there for a long time until at last I got my battery and was transferred here, as you see. I don't really remember you, I only remember that there were three sisters. I have a vivid recollection of your father. I have only to shut my eyes to see him as if he were alive. I used to visit your house in Moscow. . . .

OLGA. I always thought I remembered everybody, but . . .

VERSHININ. My name is Alexander Ignateievitch.

IRINA. Alexander Ignateievitch, you've come from Moscow. What a surprise!

OLGA. We are going there, to live, you see.

IRINA. We expect to be there by autumn. It's our native town; we were born there, in Old Basmanny Street . . . [*They both laugh gayly*]

MASHA. We've unexpectedly met a fellow townsman. [*Briskly*] I remember now: Do you remember, Olga, they used to speak at home of a "lovelorn Major." You were only a Lieutenant then, and in love with somebody, but for some reason they always called you a Major in fun.

VERSHININ [*laughs*] That's it . . . the lovelorn Major, that's it!

MASHA. You wore only mustaches then. You have grown older! [*Through her tears*] How you have grown older!

VERSHININ. Yes, when they used to call me the lovelorn Major, I was young and in love. I've grown out of both now.

OLGA. But you haven't a single white hair. You're older, but you're not yet old.

VERSHININ. Still, I'm forty-two. Have you been away from Moscow long?

IRINA. Eleven years. What are you crying for, Masha, you little fool . . . [*Crying*] And I'm crying, too.

MASHA. It's all right. And where did you live?

VERSHININ. In Old Basmanny Street.

OLGA. So did we.

VERSHININ. Once I lived in Niemetskaya Street. That was when the Red Barracks were my headquarters. There's a gloomy bridge in between with the water rushing below. One grows melancholy when one is alone there. [*Pause*] Here the river is so wide and fine! It's a splendid river!

OLGA. Yes, but it's so cold. It's very cold here, and the mosquitoes —

VERSHININ. What are you saying! Here you have such a fine healthy Russian climate. You've a forest, a river . . . and birches. Dear, modest birches, I like them more than any other tree. It's good to live here. Only it's odd that the railway station should be thirteen miles away. . . . Nobody knows why.

SOLYONY. I know why. [*All look at him*] Because if it was near it wouldn't be far off, and if it's far off, it can't be near.

[*An awkward pause*]

TUZENBACH. Vassily Vassilievitch — he is always jesting!

OLGA. Now I know who you are. I remember.

VERSHININ. I used to know your mother.

TCHEBUTIKIN. She was a good woman, God rest her soul.

IRINA. Mother is buried in Moscow.

OLGA. At the Novo-Devitsky Cemetery.

MASHA. Imagine, I'm beginning to forget her face. We'll be forgotten the same way — forgotten!

VERSHININ. Yes, forgotten! It's our fate, it can't be helped. The time will come when everything that

seems serious, significant, or very important to us will be forgotten, or considered trivial. [*Pause*] And the curious thing is that we can't possibly find out what will come to be regarded as great and important, and what will be worthless or ridiculous. Didn't the discoveries of Copernicus, or Columbus, say, seem unnecessary and ludicrous at first, while rubbish written by a fool was considered the whole truth? And it may happen that our present mode of life with which we are so satisfied, will in time appear strange, inconvenient, stupid, unclean, perhaps even sinful. . . .

TUZENBACH. Who knows? But, on the other hand, they may call our life noble and honor its memory. We've abolished torture and capital punishment, we live in security, but how much suffering there is still!

SOLYONY [*in a feeble voice*] There, there. . . . The Baron will go without his dinner if you only let him talk philosophy.

TUZENBACH. Vassily Vassilievitch, please leave me alone. [*Takes another chair*] This is a bore, you know.

SOLYONY [*feebly*] There, there, there.

TUZENBACH [*to Vershinin*] The amount of suffering we see to-day — there is so much of it! — shows that society has already reached a specific moral improvement.

VERSHININ. Yes, yes, of course.

TCHEBUTIKIN. You said just now, Baron, that they may call our life noble; but we are very petty. . . . [*Stands up*] See how small I am. But I can console myself by saying that my life is noble and lofty. [*Violin played back stage*]

MASHA. That's Andrei playing — our brother.

IRINA. He's a cultured man. I expect he will be a professor some day. Father was a soldier, but his son chose an academic career.

MASHA. That was father's wish.

OLGA. We teased him to-day. We think he's a bit in love.

IRINA. With a girl in town. She will probably be here to-day.

MASHA. You should see the way she dresses! Quite prettily, quite fashionably, too, but so unbecomingly! Some queer bright yellow skirt with a wretched little fringe and a red bodice. And her cheeks look so washed out, so washed out! Andrei isn't in love; I can't believe it. After all, he has taste! He's simply making fun of us. I heard yesterday that she was going to marry Protopopoff, the chairman of the Local Council. That would do her nicely. . . . [*At the side door*] Andrei, come here! Just for a minute, dear!

[*Enter Andrei*]

OLGA. My brother, Andrei Sergeievitch.

VERSHININ. My name is Vershinin.

ANDREI. Mine is Prozoroff. [*Wipes his perspiring face*] You've come to take charge of the battery?

OLGA. Just think, Alexander Ignateievitch comes from Moscow.

ANDREI. That's all right. Now my little sisters won't give you any rest.

VERSHININ. I've already managed to bore them.

IRINA. Just look what a nice little picture frame

Andrei gave me to-day. [*Shows it*] He made it himself.

VERSHININ [*looks at the frame and does not know what to say*] Yes. . . . It's a thing that . . .

IRINA. And he made that frame over there, on the piano as well. [*Andrei waves his hand and walks away*]

OLGA. He has a degree, plays the violin, carves all sorts of things out of wood, and is really a jack-of-all-trades. Don't go away, Andrei! He's got into a habit of always going away. Come here!

[*Masha and Irina take his arms and laughingly lead him back*]

MASHA. Come, come!

ANDREI. Please leave me alone.

MASHA. You are funny. Alexander Ignateievitch used to be called the lovelorn Major, but he never minded.

VERSHININ. Not the least.

MASHA. I'd like to call you the lovelorn fiddler!

IRINA. Or the lovelorn professor!

OLGA. He's in love! Little Andrei is in love!

IRINA [*applauds*] Bravo, bravo! Encore! Little Andrei is in love.

TCHEBUTIKIN [*goes up behind Andrei and puts his arms about him*] We were created for love only!

[*Roars with laughter, then sits down holding his newspaper in his hands*]

ANDREI. That's enough, quite enough. . . . [*Wipes his face*] I couldn't sleep all night and now I am not quite myself. I read until four o'clock, then tried to sleep, but nothing happened. I thought about one thing

and another, and then dawn came and the sun crept into my bedroom. This summer, while I'm here, I'd like to translate a book from the English. . . .

VERSHININ. Do you read English?

ANDREI. Yes; father, rest his soul, educated us almost violently. It may seem trivial and foolish, but it's nevertheless true, that after his death I began to fill out, and I gained a good deal of weight within the year, as if my body had been freed from some tremendous pressure. Thanks to father, my sisters and I know French, German, and English, and Irina knows Italian as well. But we paid dearly for it all!

MASHA. A knowledge of three languages is an unnecessary luxury in this town. It isn't even a luxury but a sort of superfluous thing, like a sixth finger. We know a great deal too much.

VERSHININ. Well, I say! [*Laughs*] You know a great deal too much! I don't think there can really be a town so dull and stupid as to have no room for a clever, cultured person. Let us suppose even that among the hundred thousand inhabitants of this backward and crude town, there are only three persons like yourself. It stands to reason that you won't be able to conquer that dark mob around you; little by little as you grow older you will be bound to give way and lose yourselves in this crowd of a hundred thousand human beings; their life will suck you under, but still, you won't disappear without having influenced anybody; later on, others like you will come, perhaps six of them, then twelve, and so on, until at last your sort will be in the majority.

In two or three hundred years life on this earth will be gorgeously beautiful and glorious. Mankind needs such a life, and if it is not ours to-day then we must look forward to it, wait, think, prepare for it. We must see and know more than our fathers and grandfathers saw and knew. [*Laughs*] And you complain that you know too much.

MASHA [*takes off her hat*] I'll stay to lunch.

IRINA [*sighs*] Really, all that should be written down.

[*Andrei has gone out quietly*]

TUZENBACH. You say that many years later, life on this earth will be beautiful and glorious. That's true. But to take part in it now, even indirectly, we must work and make ready —

VERSHININ [*gets up*] Yes. What a lot of flowers you have. [*Looks round*] It's a beautiful apartment! I envy you! All my life I moved from one quarter to another, and they never had more than two chairs, a sofa, and a fireplace which smoked. I've never had flowers like these in my life. . . . [*Rubs his hands*] Well, well!

TUZENBACH. Yes, we must work. You are probably thinking to yourself: The German is growing sentimental. But I assure you I'm a Russian, I can't even speak German. My father belonged to the Orthodox Church. . . . [*Pause*]

VERSHININ [*walks about the stage*] I often wonder: suppose we could begin life over again, perfectly aware of our actions? Suppose we could use one life, already ended, as a sort of rough draft for another? I think

that every one of us would try, more than anything else, not to repeat himself; at the very least he would rearrange his manner of life, he would make sure of rooms like these, with flowers and light . . . I have a wife and two daughters. My wife's health is delicate and so on and so forth, and if I had to begin life all over again I would not marry. . . . No, no!

[*Enter Kuligin in a regulation tunic*]

KULIGIN [*going up to Irina*] Dear sister, allow me to congratulate you on your birthday and to wish you, sincerely and from the bottom of my heart, good health and everything else in the world. And then let me offer you this book as a present. [*Gives it to her*] It is the history of our High School during the last fifty years, written by myself. The book is worthless, and written because I had nothing else to do, but read it all the same. How are you, gentlemen? [*To Vershinin*] My name is Kuligin, I am a teacher of the local High School, with the rank of Assistant Councilor of Pedagogics. [*To Irina*] You will in this book find a list of all our High School graduates of the last fifty years. *Feci quod potui, faciant meliora potentes.* [*Kisses Masha*]

IRINA. But you gave me one of these at Easter.

KULIGIN [*laughs*] Impossible! You'd better give it back to me in that case, or else give it to the Colonel. Take it, Colonel. You may read it some day when you're bored.

VERSHININ. Thank you. [*Prepares to go*] I am so glad that I have made the acquaintance of . . .

OLGA. Must you go? No, not yet?

IRINA. You'll stay and have lunch with us. Please do.

OLGA. Yes, please!

VERSHININ [*bows*] I seem to have dropped in on your birthday. Forgive me, I didn't know, and I didn't offer you my congratulations. . . .

[*Goes with Olga into the living-room*]

KULIGIN. To-day is Sunday, the day of rest, so let us rest and rejoice, each in a manner compatible with his age and disposition. The carpets will have to be taken up for the summer and put away till winter. . . . Persian powder or naphthaline. . . . The Romans were healthy because they knew both how to work and how to rest, they had *mens sana in corpore sano*. Their lives ran along certain well-defined grooves. Our director says: "The chief thing about each life is its routine. Whoever loses his routine loses himself" — and it's just the same with our daily actions. [*Takes Masha by the waist, laughing*] Masha loves me. My wife loves me. And you ought to put the window curtains away with the carpets. . . . I'm awfully pleased with life to-day. Masha, we have to be at the director's at four. They're getting up an excursion for the pedagogues and their families.

MASHA. I shan't go.

KULIGIN [*hurt*] My dear Masha, why not?

MASHA. I'll tell you later . . . [*angrily*] All right, I'll go, only please don't bother me. . . . [*Steps to one side*]

KULIGIN. And then we're to spend the evening at

the director's. In spite of his ill-health that man tries, above everything else, to be sociable. A splendid, illuminating personality. A wonderful man. After yesterday's committee meeting, he said to me: "I'm tired, Fyodor Ilyitch, I'm tired!" [*Looks at the clock, then at his watch*] Your clock is seven minutes fast. "Yes," he said, "I'm tired."

[*Violin played off stage*]

OLGA. Let's sit down to lunch, people! There's to be a masterpiece of a pie!

KULIGIN. Oh my dear, dear Olga. Yesterday I worked from early morning till eleven at night, and got awfully tired. To-day I'm quite happy. [*Goes into living-room*] My dear . . .

TCHEBUTIKIN [*puts his paper into his pocket, and combs his beard*] A pie? Splendid!

MASHA [*severely to Tchebutikin*] Only mind; you're not to drink anything to-day. Do you hear? It's bad for you.

TCHEBUTIKIN. Oh, that's all right. I haven't been drunk for two years. [*Impatiently*] Motherkin, what difference does it make anyway?

MASHA. All the same, don't you dare drink! Don't you dare! [*Angrily, but so that her husband should not hear*] Another dull evening at the Director's, confound it!

TUZENBACH. I shouldn't go if I were you. . . . It's quite simple.

TCHEBUTIKIN. Don't go, dear heart!

MASHA. Yes, "don't go. . . ." It's a damned unbearable life . . . [*Goes into living-room*]

TCHEBUTIKIN [*follows her*] It's not so bad.

SOLYONY [*going into the living-room*] There, there, there. . . .

TUZENBACH. Vassily Vassilievitch, that's enough! That will do!

SOLYONY. There, there, there. . . .

KULIGIN [*gayly*] Your health, Colonel! I'm a pedagogue and quite at home here. I'm Masha's husband. . . . She's a good soul, a very good soul.

VERSHININ. I'll have some of this dark vodka . . . [*Drinks*] Your health! [*To Olga*] I'm very comfortable here!

[*Only Irina and Tuzenbach are now left in the sitting-room*]

IRINA. Masha's out of sorts to-day. She married when she was eighteen, when he seemed to her the wisest of men. And now it's different. He's the kindest man, but not the wisest.

OLGA [*impatiently*] Andrei, when are you coming?

ANDREI [*off*] One minute. [*Enters and goes to table*]

TUZENBACH. What are you thinking of?

IRINA. I don't like this Solyony of yours and I'm afraid of him. He says only foolish things.

TUZENBACH. He's a queer man. I'm sorry for him, though he vexes me. I think he's shy. When there are just the two of us he's quite all right and very good company; when other people are about he's rough and irritating. Don't go in, let them sit down without us in the meanwhile. Let me stay with you. What are you thinking of? [*Pause*] You're twenty. I'm not yet thirty. How many years are there left to us, with their

long monotony of days, filled with my love for you. . . .

IRINA. Nikolai Lvovitch, don't speak to me of love.

TUZENBACH [*does not hear*] I've a great thirst for life, struggle, and work, and this thirst has mated with my love for you, Irina, and you're so beautiful, and life seems so beautiful to me! What are you thinking of?

IRINA. You say that life is beautiful! Yes, if we only believe it to be so! So far the life of us three has not been beautiful; it has been stifling us . . . like a wet blanket . . . I'm crying. I oughtn't. . . . [*Dries her tears, smiles*] We must work, work. That is why we are unhappy and look at life so sadly; we don't know what work is. Our parents looked on work with contempt.

[*Enter Natalia Ivanovna; she wears a pink dress and a green sash*]

NATASHA. They're already at lunch. . . . I'm late. . . . [*Rapidly examines herself in a mirror, and straightens her clothes*] I think my hair's done all right. . . . [*Sees Irina*] Dear Irina Sergeievna, I congratulate you! [*Kisses her tenderly and at length*] You've so many visitors, I'm really ashamed. . . . How do you do, Baron!

OLGA [*enters from living-room*] Here's Natalia Ivanovna. How are you, dear! [*They kiss*]

NATASHA. Happy returns. I'm awfully embarrassed, you've so many people here.

OLGA. Oh come! They are all friends. [*Frightened, in an undertone*] You're wearing a green sash! My dear, you shouldn't!

NATASHA. Is it a sign of anything?

OLGA. No, it simply doesn't go well . . . and it looks so queer.

NATASHA [*in a tearful voice*] Yes? But it isn't really green, it's too dull for that. [*Goes into living-room with Olga. They have all sat down to lunch in the living-room, the sitting-room is empty*]

KULIGIN. I wish you a nice fiancé, Irina. It's high time you married.

TCHEBUTIKIN. Natalia Ivanovna, I wish you the same.

KULIGIN. Natalia Ivanovna has a fiancé already.

MASHA [*raps with her fork on a plate*] I'll have a glass of wine. Life is all right if you don't waste it!

KULIGIN. You've lost three good conduct marks.

VERSHININ. This is a good cordial. What's it made of?

SOLYONY. Cockroaches!

IRINA [*offended*] Phoo! How disgusting!

OLGA. There is to be a roast turkey and a sweet apple pie for dinner. Thank goodness I can spend all day and evening at home. You'll come in the evening, ladies and gentlemen. . . .

VERSHININ. And please may I come in the evening?

IRINA. Please do.

NATASHA. They don't stand on ceremony here.

TCHEBUTIKIN. Nature created us only for love.
[Laughs]

ANDREI [*angrily*] Please don't. Aren't you tired of it?

[Enter Fedotik and Rode with a large basket of flowers]

FEDOTIK. They're lunching already.

RODE [*loudly and thickly*] Lunching? Yes, so they are. . . .

FEDOTIK. Wait a minute! [*Takes a photograph*] That's one. No, just a moment. . . . [*Takes another*] That's two. Now we're ready!

[*They take the basket and go into living-room, where they are the center of a noisy reception*]

RODE [*loudly*] Congratulations and best wishes! Lovely weather to-day, simply perfect. I was out walking with the High School students all the morning. I supervise their drills.

FEDOTIK. You may move, Irina Sergeievna! [*Takes a photograph*] You look well to-day. [*Takes a humming-top out of his pocket*] Here's a humming-top, by the way. It's got a lovely note!

IRINA. How very nice!

MASHA. "A green oak stands by the sea,
A chain of gold around it . . .
A chain of gold around it. . . ."

[*Tearfully*] What am I saying that for? Those words have been running in my head all day. . . .

KULIGIN. There are thirteen at table!

RODE [*aloud*] Surely you don't believe in that superstition? [*Laughter*]

KULIGIN. If there are thirteen at table then it means there are lovers present. It isn't you, Ivan Romanovitch, confound it! . . . [*Laughter*]

TCHEBUTIKIN. I'm a hardened sinner, but I really don't see why Natalia Ivanovna should blush. . . .

[*Loud laughter; Natasha runs out in the living-room; followed by Andrei*]

ANDREI. Don't pay any attention to them! Wait . . . stop, please. . . .

NATASHA. I'm embarrassed . . . I don't know what's the matter with me and they're all laughing at me. It wasn't nice of me to leave the table like that, but I can't help myself . . . I can't. [*Covers her face with her hands*]

ANDREI. My dear, I beg you. I implore you not to excite yourself. I assure you they're only joking, they're kind people. My dear, dear child, they're all kind and sincere people, and they like both you and me. Come here to the window, they can't see us here. . . . [*Looks around*]

NATASHA. I'm so unaccustomed to meeting people!

ANDREI. Oh, your youth, your splendid, beautiful youth! Darling, don't be so excited! Trust me, please trust me. . . . I'm so happy, my soul is full of love, of ecstasy. They can't see us! They can't! Why did I fall in love with you — when I did? — Oh, I can't understand! My dear! little sweetheart, be my wife! I love you, love you . . . [*They kiss*] as I never loved any one. . . .

[*Two officers come in and, seeing the lovers kiss, stop in astonishment*]

CURTAIN

ACT TWO

As before. It is 8 p.m. Somebody is heard playing a concertina outside in the street. There is no fire. Natalia Ivanovna enters dressed in a wrapper, carrying a candle; she stops by the door which leads into Andrei's room.

NATASHA. What are you doing, Andrei? Are you reading? It's nothing, only I. . . . [*She opens another door, and looks in, then closes it*] Isn't there any fire. . . .

ANDREI [*enters with book in hand*] What are you doing, Natasha?

NATASHA. I was looking to see if there wasn't a fire. It's Shrovetide, and the servants are simply beside themselves; I must take care that something doesn't happen. When I came through the living-room yesterday at midnight, there was a candle burning. I couldn't find out who had lighted it. [*Puts down her candle*] What's the time?

ANDREI [*looks at his watch*] A quarter past eight.

NATASHA. And Olga and Irina aren't in yet. The poor things are still at work. Olga at the teacher's council, Irina at the telegraph office. . . . [*Sighs*] I said to your sister this morning, "Irina, darling, you must take care of yourself." But she pays no attention. Did you say it was a quarter past eight? I am afraid little

Bobby is quite ill. Why is he so cold? He was feverish yesterday, but to-day he is quite cold . . . I am so frightened!

ANDREI. It's all right, Natasha. The boy is well.

NATASHA. Still, I think we should put him on a diet. I am so afraid. And the performers were to be here after nine; they had better not come, Andrei.

ANDREI. I don't know. After all, they were asked.

NATASHA. This morning, when the little boy woke up and saw me he suddenly smiled; that means he knew me. "Good morning, Bobby!" I said, "good morning, darling." And he laughed. Children understand, they understand very well. So I'll tell them, Andrei dear, not to receive the performers.

ANDREI [*hesitatingly*] But what about my sisters? This is their flat.

NATASHA. They'll do as I wish. They are so kind. . . . [*Going*] I ordered sour milk for supper. The doctor says you must eat sour milk and nothing else, or you won't get thin. [*Stops*] Bobby is so cold. I'm afraid his room is too cold for him. It would be nice to put him into another room till the warm weather comes. Irina's room, for instance, is just right for the child: it's dry and has the sun all day. I must tell her, she can share Olga's room. . . . It isn't as if she was at home in the daytime, she only sleeps here. . . . [*A pause*] Andrei, darling, why are you so silent?

ANDREI. I was just thinking. . . . There is really nothing to say. . . .

NATASHA. Yes . . . there was something I wanted

to tell you . . . Oh, yes. Ferapont has come from the Council offices, he wants to see you.

ANDREI [*yawns*] Call him in!

[*Natasha goes out; Andrei reads his book, stooping over the candle which she has left behind. Ferapont enters; he wears a tattered old coat with the collar turned up. His ears are muffled*]

ANDREI. Good morning, grandfather. What have you to say?

FERAPONT. The Chairman sends a book and some documents or other. Here . . . [*Hands him a book and a packet*]

ANDREI. Thank you. It's all right. Why couldn't you come earlier? It's past eight now.

FERAPONT. What?

ANDREI [*louder*] I say you've come late, it's past eight.

FERAPONT. Yes, yes. I came when it was still light, but they wouldn't let me in. They said you were busy. Well, what was I to do? If you're busy, you're busy, and I'm in no hurry. [*He thinks that Andrei is asking him something*] What?

ANDREI. Nothing. [*Looks through the book*] Tomorrow is Friday. I'm not supposed to go to work, but I'll come — all the same . . . and do some work. It's dull at home. [*Pause*] Oh, my dear old man, how strangely life changes, and how it deceives one! To-day, out of sheer boredom, I took up this book — old university lectures, and I couldn't help laughing. My God, I'm secretary of the local district council, the council which has Protopopoff for its chairman, yes, I'm the

secretary, and the summit of my ambition is — to become a member of the council! I to be a member of the local district council, I, who dream every night that I'm a professor of Moscow University, a famous scholar of whom all Russia is proud!

FERAPONT. I can't tell . . . I'm hard of hearing. . . .

ANDREI. If you weren't, I don't suppose I should talk to you. I've got to talk to somebody, and my wife doesn't understand me, and I'm a bit afraid of my sisters — I don't know why unless it is that they might make fun of me and make me feel ashamed . . . I don't drink, I don't like public houses, but old fellow, how I should like to be sitting just now in Tyestoff's place in Moscow, or at the Great Moscow!

FERAPONT. Moscow? That's where a contractor told me once that some merchants or other ate pancakes; one ate forty and he died, he was saying. Either forty or fifty, I forget which.

ANDREI. In Moscow you can sit in an enormous restaurant where you don't know anybody and where nobody knows you, and you don't feel that you're a stranger for all that. And here you know everybody and everybody knows you, and you're a stranger . . . and a lonely stranger.

FERAPONT. What? And the same contractor said — perhaps he was lying — that there was a cable stretching right across Moscow.

ANDREI. What for?

FERAPONT. I can't tell. The contractor said so.

ANDREI. Rubbish. [*He reads*] Were you ever in Moscow?

FERAPONT [*after a pause*] No. God did not lead me there. [*Pause*] Shall I leave?

ANDREI. You may. Good-by. [*Ferapont goes*] Good-by. [*Reads*] You can come to-morrow and fetch these documents . . . Run along . . . [*Pause*] He's gone. [*A ring*] Yes, yes . . .

[*Stretches himself and slowly goes into his own room. Behind the scene the nurse is singing a lullaby to the child. Masha and Vershinin come in. While they talk, a maid lights candles and a lamp*]

MASHA. I don't know. [*Pause*] I don't know. Of course, habit counts for a great deal. After father's death, for instance, it took us a long time to get used to the absence of orderlies. But, apart from habit, it seems to me in all fairness that, however it may be in other towns, the best and most thoroughly educated people are army men.

VERSHININ. I'm thirsty. I should like some tea.

MASHA [*glancing at her watch*] They'll bring it soon. I was married when I was eighteen, and I was afraid of my husband because he was a teacher and I'd only just left school. Then he seemed to me frightfully wise and learned and important. And now, unfortunately, that has changed.

VERSHININ. Yes . . . yes.

MASHA. I don't speak of my husband, I've grown used to him, but civilians in general are so often coarse, impolite, uneducated. Their rudeness offends me, it angers

me. I suffer when I see that a man isn't quite sufficiently refined, or delicate, or polite. I simply suffer agonies when I happen to be among schoolmasters, my husband's colleagues.

VERSHININ. Yes . . . But it seems to me that civilians and army men are equally interesting, in this town, at any rate. It's all the same! If you listen to a member of the local intelligentsia, whether civilian or military, he will tell you that he's sick of his wife, sick of his house, sick of his estate, sick of his horses. . . . We Russians are extremely gifted in the direction of thinking on an exalted plane, but, tell me, why do we aim so low in real life? Why?

MASHA. Why?

VERSHININ. Why is a Russian sick of his children, sick of his wife? And why are his wife and children sick of him?

MASHA. You're a little downhearted to-day.

VERSHININ. Perhaps I am. I haven't had any dinner, I've had nothing to eat since morning. My daughter is a little under the weather and when my girls are ill, I get very anxious and my conscience tortures me because they have such a mother. Oh, if you had seen her to-day! What an insignificant creature! We began quarreling at seven in the morning and at nine I slammed the door and went out. [*Pause*] I never speak of it, it's strange that I should complain to you alone. [*Kisses her hand*] Don't be angry with me. I haven't anybody but you, nobody at all. . . . [*Pause*]

MASHA. What a noise in the oven. Just before

father's death there was a noise in the pipe, just like that.

VERSHININ. Are you superstitious?

MASHA. Yes.

VERSHININ. That's strange. [*Kisses her hand*] You are a splendid, wonderful woman. Splendid, wonderful! It is dark here, but I can see the sparkle in your eyes!

MASHA [*sits on another chair*] There is better light here.

VERSHININ. I love you, love you, love you. . . . I love your eyes, your gestures, I dream of them. . . . Splendid, wonderful woman!

MASHA [*laughing gently*] When you talk to me like that, I laugh; I don't know why, for I'm afraid. Don't repeat it, please. . . . [*In an undertone*] No, go on, it's all the same to me. . . . [*Covers her face with her hands*] Somebody's coming, let's talk about something else. . . .

[*Irina and Tuzenbach come in through the living-room*]

TUZENBACH. My surname is really triple. I am called Baron Tuzenbach-Krone-Altschauer, but I am Russian and Orthodox, just as you are. There is very little German left in me, unless perhaps it is the patience and the obstinacy with which I bore you. I see you home every night.

IRINA. I am so tired!

TUZENBACH. And I'll come to the telegraph office to see you home every day for ten or twenty years, until

you drive me away. [*He sees Masha and Vershinin; joyfully*] Is that you? How do you do?

IRINA. Well, I am home at last. [*To Masha*] A lady came to telegraph to her brother in Saratoff that her son died to-day, and she couldn't remember the address. So she sent the telegram without an address, just to Saratoff. She was crying. And for some reason or other I was rude to her. "I've no time," I said. It was so stupid. Are the performers coming to-night?

MASHA. Yes.

IRINA [*sitting down in an armchair*] I need a rest. I am tired.

TUZENBACH [*smiling*] When you come home from your work you seem so young, and so pitiful. . . . [*Pause*]

IRINA. I am tired. No, I don't like the telegraph office, I don't like it.

MASHA. You've grown thinner. . . . [*Whistles a little*] And you look younger, and your face has become like a boy's.

TUZENBACH. That's the way she does her hair.

IRINA. I must find another position, this one is not to my liking. The very thing I wanted and hoped to get, is lacking. Labor without poetry, without ideas. . . . [*A knock on the floor*] The doctor is knocking. [*To Tuzenbach*] Will you knock, dear? I can't. . . . I'm tired. . . . [*Tuzenbach knocks*] He'll come in a minute. Something ought to be done. Yesterday the doctor and Andrei played cards at the club and lost money. Andrei seems to have lost 200 rubles.

MASHA [*with indifference*] What can we do now?

IRINA. He lost money a fortnight ago, he lost money in December. Perhaps if he lost everything we should go away from this town. Oh, my God, I dream of Moscow every night. I'm just like a lunatic. [*Laughs*] We go there in June, and before June there's still . . . February, March, April, May . . . nearly half a year!

MASHA. Only Natasha mustn't learn of these losses.

IRINA. I suppose it would be all the same to her.

[*Tchebutikin, who has only just got out of bed — he was resting after dinner — comes into the living-room and combs his beard. He then sits at the table and takes a newspaper from his pocket*]

MASHA. Here he is. . . . Has he paid his rent?

IRINA [*laughs*] No. He's been here eight months and hasn't paid a kopeck. Seems to have forgotten.

MASHA [*laughs*] What dignity in his pose! [*They all laugh*]

IRINA. Why are you so silent, Alexander Ignateievitch?

VERSHININ. I don't know. I must have some tea. Half my life for a glass of tea: I haven't had anything since morning.

TCHIBUTIKIN. Irina Sergeievna!

IRINA. What is it?

TCHIBUTIKIN. Please come here, *Venez ici*. [*Irina goes and sits at the table*] I can't do without you. [*Irina begins to play solitaire*]

VERSHININ. Well, if we can't have tea, let's philosophize, at any rate.

TUZENBACH. Yes, let's. About what?

VERSHININ. About what? Let us meditate . . . about life as it will be after our time; for example, in two or three hundred years.

TUZENBACH. Well? After our time people will fly about in balloons, the cut of one's coat will change, perhaps they'll discover a sixth sense and develop it, but life will remain the same, laborious, mysterious, and happy. And in a thousand years' time, people will still be sighing: "Life is hard!" — and at the same time they'll be just as afraid of death, and unwilling to meet it, as we are.

VERSHININ [*thoughtfully*] How can I put it? It seems to me that everything on earth must change, little by little, and is already changing under our very eyes. After two or three hundred years, after a thousand — the actual time doesn't matter — a new and happy age will begin. We, of course, shall not take part in it, but we live and work and even suffer to-day that it should come. We create it — and in that one object is our destiny, and, if you like, our happiness.

[*Masha laughs softly.*]

TUZENBACH. What is it?

MASHA. I don't know. I've been laughing all day, ever since morning.

VERSHININ. I finished my education at the same point as you; I have had no university training; I read a lot, but I cannot choose my books and perhaps what I read is not at all what I should, but the longer I live, the more I want to know. My hair is turning white, I

am nearly an old man now, but I know so little, oh, so little! But I think I know the things that matter most, and that are most real. I know them well. And I wish I could make you understand that there is no happiness for us, that there should not and cannot be. . . . We must only work and work, and happiness is only for our distant posterity. [*Pause*] If not for me, then for the descendants of my descendants.

[*Fedotik and Rode come into the living-room; they sit and sing softly, strumming on guitars*]

TUZENBACH. According to you, one should not even think about happiness! But suppose I am happy?

VERSHININ. No.

TUZENBACH [*moves his hands and laughs*] We do not seem to understand each other. How can I convince you? [*Masha laughs quietly, Tuzenbach continues, pointing at her*] Yes, laugh! [*To Vershinin*] Not only after two or three centuries, but in a million years, life will still be as it was; life does not change, it remains forever, following its own laws which do not concern us, or which, at any rate, you will never be able to fathom. Migrant birds, cranes for example, fly and fly, and whatever thoughts, high or low, enter their heads, they will still fly and not know why or where. They fly and will continue to fly, whatever philosophers should be born among them; they may philosophize as much as they like, only they will fly. . . .

MASHA. Still is there a meaning?

TUZENBACH. A meaning. . . . Imagine that snow is falling! Any special meaning in that? [*Pause*]

MASHA. It seems to me that a man must have faith, or must search for a faith, or his life will be empty, empty . . . To live and not to know why the cranes fly, why babies are born, why there are stars in the sky . . . Either you must know why you live, or everything is trivial, not worth a straw. [*A pause*]

VERSHININ. Still, I am sorry that my youth has gone.

MASHA. Gogol says: life in this world is a dull matter, gentlemen!

TUZENBACH. And I say it's difficult to argue with you, gentlemen! Confound it all!

TCHEBUTIKIN [*reading*] Balzac was married at Berditcheff. [*Irina is singing softly*] That's worth making a note of. [*He makes a note*] Balzac was married at Berditcheff. [*Goes on reading*]

IRINA [*laying out cards, thoughtfully*] Balzac was married at Berditcheff.

TUZENBACH. The die is cast. I've handed in my resignation, Maria Sergeievna.

MASHA. So I heard. I don't see what good that does; I don't like civilians.

TUZENBACH. Never mind . . . [*Gets up*] I'm not handsome; what use am I as a soldier? Well, it makes no difference . . . I shall work. If only just once in my life I could work so that I could come home in the evening, fall exhausted on my bed, and go to sleep at once. [*Going into the living-room*] Workmen, I suppose, do sleep soundly!

FEDOTIK [*to Irina*] I bought some colored pencils for

you at Pizhikoff's in the Moscow Road, just now. And here is a little knife.

IRINA. You have got into the habit of behaving to me as if I am a little girl, but I am grown up. [*Takes the pencils and the knife, then, with joy*] How lovely!

FEDOTIK. And I bought myself a knife . . . look at it . . . one blade, another, a third, an ear-scoop, scissors, nail-cleaners. . . .

RODE [*loudly*] Doctor, how old are you?

TCHEBUTIKIN. I? Thirty-two. [*Laughter*]

FEDOTIK. I'll show you another kind of solitaire. [*Lays out cards*]

[*A samovar is brought in; Anfisa attends to it; a little later Natasha enters and helps by the table; Solyony arrives and, after greetings, sits at the table*]

VERSHININ. What a wind!

MASHA. Yes. I'm tired of winter. I've already forgotten what summer's like.

IRINA. The solitaire is coming out, I see. We shall go to Moscow.

FEDOTIK. No, it won't come out. Look, the eight was on the two of spades. [*Laughs*] That means you won't go to Moscow.

TCHEBUTIKIN [*reading paper*] Tsitsikar. Smallpox is raging here.

ANFISA [*coming up to Masha*] Masha, have some tea, little mother. [*To Vershinin*] Please have some, sir . . . excuse me, but I've forgotten your name. . . .

MASHA. Bring some here, nurse. I shan't go over there.

IRINA. Nurse!

ANFISA. Coming, coming!

NATASHA [*to Solyony*] Children at the breast understand perfectly. I said, "Good morning, Bobby; good morning, dear!" and he looked at me in quite an unusual way. You think it's only the mother in me that is speaking; I assure you that isn't so! He's a wonderful child.

SOLYONY. If he was my child I'd roast him on a frying-pan and eat him. [*Takes his glass into the drawing-room and sits in a corner*].

NATASHA [*covers her face in her hands*] Vulgar, ill-bred man!

MASHA. Lucky the one who doesn't notice whether it's winter now, or summer. I think that if I were in Moscow, I shouldn't mind the weather.

VERSHININ. A few days ago I was reading the prison diary of a French minister. He had been sentenced on account of the Panama scandal. With what joy, what delight, he speaks of the birds which he saw through the prison windows, which he had never noticed while he was a minister. Now, of course, that he is at liberty, he notices birds no more than he did before. When you live in Moscow, you'll not notice it, in just the same way. There can be no happiness for us, it exists only in our anticipations.

TUZENBACH [*takes cardboard box from the table*] Where is the candy?

IRINA. Solyony has eaten it.

TUZENBACH. All of it?

ANFISA [*servicing tea*] There's a letter for you.

VERSHININ. For me? [*Takes the letter*] From my daughter. [*Reads*] Yes, of course . . . I will go quietly. Excuse me, Maria Sergeievna. I shan't have any tea. [*Stands up, excited*] That eternal story. . . .

MASHA. What is it? Is it a secret?

VERSHININ [*quietly*] My wife has poisoned herself again. I must go. I'll leave quietly. It's all awfully unpleasant. [*Kisses Masha's hand*] My dear, splendid, good woman . . . I'll go this way, quietly. [*Exit*]

ANFISA. Where has he gone? And I'd served tea . . . What a man!

MASHA [*angrily*] Be quiet! You never give one a moment's peace . . . [*Goes to the table with her cap*] I'm tired of you, old woman!

ANFISA. My dear! Why are you cross?

ANDREI'S VOICE. Anfisa!

ANFISA [*mocking*] Anfisa! He sits there and . . . [*Exit*]

MASHA [*in the living-room, by the table angrily*] Let me sit down! [*Disturbs the cards on the table*] Here you are, spreading your cards out. Have some tea!

IRINA. You are cross, Masha.

MASHA. If I am cross, then don't talk to me. Don't touch me!

TCHEBUTIKIN. Don't touch her, don't touch her . . .

MASHA. You're sixty, but you're like a boy, always up to some beastly nonsense.

NATASHA [*sighs*] Dear Masha, why use such language? With your beautiful face and body, you would be simply fascinating in good society, I tell you so

frankly, if it wasn't for your language. *Je vous prie, pardonnez-moi, Marie, mais vous avez des manières un peu grossières.*

TUZENBACH [*restraining his laughter*] Let me have . . . Let me have . . . there's some brandy, I think.

NATASHA. *Il parfait, que mon Bobick déjà ne dort pas*, he has awakened. He isn't well to-day. I'll go to him, excuse me. . . . [*Exit*]

IRINA. Where has Alexander Ignateievitch gone?

MASHA. Home. Something extraordinary happened to his wife again.

TUZENBACH [*goes to Solyony with a brandy-flask in his hands*] You go on sitting by yourself, thinking of something — goodness knows what. Come and let's make peace. Let's have some brandy. [*They drink*] I expect I'll have to play the piano all night, some rubbish most likely . . . well, so be it!

SOLYONY. Why make peace? I haven't quarreled with you.

TUZENBACH. You always make me feel as if something had taken place between us. You've a strange character, you must admit.

SOLYONY [*declaims*] "I am strange, but who is not? Don't be angry, Aleko!"

TUZENBACH. And what has Aleko to do with it? [*Pause*]

SOLYONY. When I'm with one other man I behave just like everybody else, but in company I'm dull and shy and . . . talk all manner of rubbish. But I'm more

honest and more honorable than very, very many people. And I can prove it.

TUZENBACH. I am often angry with you, you always fasten on to me in company, but I like you all the same. I'm going to drink my fill to-night, whatever happens. Drink now!

SOLYONY. Let's drink. [*They drink*] I never had anything against you, Baron. But my character is like Lermontoff's. [*In a low voice*] I even rather resemble Lermontoff, they say. . . .

[*Takes a scent-bottle from his pocket, and scents his hands*]

TUZENBACH. I've sent in my resignation. Enough said! I've been thinking about it for five years, and at last I made up my mind. I shall work.

SOLYONY [*declaims*] "Do not be angry, Aleko . . . forget, forget, thy dreams of yore . . ."

[*While he is speaking Andrei enters quietly with a book and sits near the candle*]

TUZENBACH. I shall work.

TCHEBUTIKIN [*going with Irina into the living-room*] And then the food was also real Caucasian onion soup, and for a roast, some chehartma.

SOLYONY. Cheremsha isn't meat at all, but a plant something like an onion.

TCHEBUTIKIN. No, my angel. Chehartma isn't onion, but roast mutton.

SOLYONY. And I tell you, cheremsha — is a sort of onion.

TCHEBUTIKIN. And I tell you chehartma — is mutton.

SOLYONY. And I tell you cheremsha — is a sort of onion.

TCHEBUTIKIN. What's the use of arguing! You've never been in the Caucasus, and never ate any chehartma.

SOLYONY. I never ate it, because I hate it. It smells like garlic.

ANDREI [*imploring*] Please, please! I beg you!

TUZENBACH. When are the performers coming?

IRINA. They promised to be here around nine; that is, quite soon.

TUZENBACH [*embraces Andrei*] "Oh my house, my house, my new built-house."

ANDREI [*dances and sings*] "Newly-built of maple-wood."

TCHEBUTIKIN [*dances*] "Its walls are like a sieve!"
[*Laughter*]

TUZENBACH [*kisses Andrei*] Hang it all, let's drink. Andrei, old boy, let's drink with you. And I'll go with you, Andrei, to the University of Moscow.

SOLYONY. Which one? There are two universities in Moscow.

ANDREI. There's only one university in Moscow.

SOLYONY. Two, I tell you.

ANDREI. I don't care if there are three. So much the better.

SOLYONY. There are two universities in Moscow! [*There are murmurs and "hushes"*] There are two universities in Moscow, the old one and the new one. And if you don't like to listen, if my words annoy you, then I

need not speak. I can even go into another room . . .
 [*Exit.*]

TUZENBACH. Bravo, bravo! [*Laughs*] Come on, now, I'm going to play. Funny man, Solyony . . .
 [*Goes to the piano and plays a waltz.*]

MASHA [*dancing solo*] The Baron's drunk, the Baron's drunk, the Baron's drunk!

[*Natasha comes in*]

NATASHA [*to Tchebutikin*] Ivan Romanovitch! [*Says something in a whisper to Tchebutikin, then goes out quietly: Tchebutikin touches Tuzenbach on the shoulder and whispers something to him*]

IRINA. What is it?

TCHEBUTIKIN. Time for us to go. Good-bye.

TUZENBACH. Good-night. It's time we went.

IRINA. But, really, the performers!

ANDREI [*in confusion*] There won't be any performers. You see, dear, Natasha says that Bobby isn't quite well, and so . . . In a word, I don't care, and it's absolutely all the same to me.

IRINA [*shrugging her shoulders*] Bobby ill!

MASHA. What is she thinking of! Well, if they are sent home, I suppose they must go. [*To Irina*] Bobby's all right, it's she herself . . . Here! [*Taps her forehead*] Little bourgeoisie!

[*Andrei goes to his room through the right-hand door, Tchebutikin follows him. In the dining-room they are saying good-bye*]

FEDOTIK. What a shame! I was expecting to spend

the evening here, but of course, if the little baby is ill . . . I'll bring him some toys to-morrow.

RODE [*loudly*] I slept late after dinner to-day because I thought I was going to dance all night. It's only nine o'clock now!

MASHA. Let's go into the street, we can talk there. Then we can settle things.

[*Good-bye and good nights are heard. Tuzenbach's merry laughter is heard. All go out. Anfisa and the maid clear the table, and put out the lights. The nurse sings. Andrei, wearing an overcoat and a hat, and Tchebutikin enter silently*]

TCHEBUTIKIN. I never managed to get married because my life passed me by like a sheet of lightning, and because I was madly in love with your mother, who was married.

ANDREI. One shouldn't marry. One shouldn't, because it's a bore.

TCHEBUTIKIN. So there I am, in my loneliness. Say what you will, loneliness is a terrible thing, old fellow . . . Though really . . . of course, it doesn't matter in the least!

ANDREI. Let's be quicker.

TCHEBUTIKIN. What are you in such a hurry for? We shall be in time.

ANDREI. I'm afraid my wife may stop me.

TCHEBUTIKIN. Ah!

ANDREI. I shan't play to-night, I shall only sit and look on. I don't feel very well . . . What am I to do for my asthma, Ivan Romanovitch?

TCHEBUTIKIN. Don't ask me! I don't remember, old fellow, I don't know.

ANDREI. Let's go through the kitchen. [*They go out. A bell rings twice; voices and laughter are heard*]

IRINA [*enters*] What's that?

ANFISA [*whispers*] The musicians! [*Bell*]

IRINA. Tell them there's nobody at home, nurse. They must excuse us.

[*Anfisa goes out. Irina walks about the room deep in thought; she is excited. Solyony enters*]

SOLYONY [*in surprise*] There's nobody here . . . Where are they all?

IRINA. They've gone home.

SOLYONY. How strange. Are you alone here?

IRINA. Yes, alone. [*A pause*] Good-bye.

SOLYONY. Just now I behaved tactlessly, thoughtlessly. But you are not like all the others, you are noble and pure, you see the truth . . . You alone can understand me. I love you, deeply, beyond measure, I love you.

IRINA. Good-bye! Go away.

SOLYONY. I cannot live without you. [*Follows her*] Oh, my happiness! [*Through his tears*] Oh, joy! Wonderful, marvelous, glorious eyes, such as I have never seen in any other woman . . .

IRINA [*coldly*] Stop it, Vassily Vassilievitch!

SOLYONY. This is the first time I spoke to you of love, and it is as if I am no longer on earth, but on another planet. [*Wipes his forehead*] Well, never mind. I can't make you love me by force, of course . . . but I don't intend to have any more-favored rivals . . . No . . . I

swear to you by all the saints, I shall kill my rival . . .
Oh, beautiful one!

[*Natasha enters with a candle; she looks in through one door, then through another, and goes past the door leading to her husband's room*]

NATASHA. Here's Andrei. Let him go on reading. Excuse me, Vassily Vassilievitch, I did not know you were here; I am in negligée.

SOLYONY. It's all the same to me. Good-bye! [*Exit*]

NATASHA. You're so tired, my poor dear girl! [*Kisses Irina*] If only you went to bed earlier.

IRINA. Is Bobby asleep?

NATASHA. Yes, but restlessly. By the way, dear, I wanted to tell you, but either you weren't at home, or I was busy . . . I think Bobby's present nursery is cold and damp. And your room would be so nice for the child. My dear, darling girl, do share Olga's room for a while!

IRINA [*not understanding*] Whose?

[*The bells of a troika are heard as it drives up to the house*]

NATASHA. You and Olga can share a room, for the time being, and Bobby can have yours. He's such a darling; to-day I said to him, "Bobby, you're mine! Mine!" And he looked at me with his dear little eyes. [*A bell rings*] It must be Olga. How late she is! [*The maid enters and whispers to Natasha*] Protopopoff? What a queer man to do such a thing. Protopopoff's come and wants me to go for a drive with him in his troika. [*Laughs*] How funny these men are . . . [*A bell rings*]

Somebody has come. Suppose I go and have half an hour's drive . . . [*To the maid*] Say I shan't be long. [*Bell rings*] Somebody's ringing, it must be Olga.

[*Exit. The maid runs out; Irina sits deep in thought; Kuligin and Olga enter, followed by Vershinin*]

KULIGIN. Well, there you are. And you said there was going to be a party.

VERSHININ. It's queer; I went away not long ago, half an hour back, and the musicians were expected.

IRINA. They've all gone.

KULIGIN. Has Masha gone, too? Where has she gone? And what's Protopopoff waiting for downstairs in his troika? Whom is he waiting for?

IRINA. Don't ask questions . . . I'm tired.

KULIGIN. Oh, you're all so touchy!

OLGA. My committee meeting is only just over. I'm tired out. Our school principal is ill, so I had to take her place. My head, my head is aching . . . [*Sits*] Andrei lost 200 rubles at cards yesterday . . . the whole town is talking of it . . .

KULIGIN. Yes, my meeting tired me, too. [*Sits*]

VERSHININ. My wife took it into her head to frighten me just now by nearly poisoning herself. It's all right now, and I'm glad — I can rest now . . . But perhaps we should go away? Well, my best wishes, Fyodor Ilyitch, let's go somewhere together! I can't, I absolutely can't stay home . . . Come on!

KULIGIN. I'm tired. I won't go. [*Gets up*] I'm tired. Has my wife gone home?

IRINA. I suppose so.

KULIGIN [*kisses Irina's hand*] Good-bye, I'm going to rest all day to-morrow and the day after. Best wishes! [*Going*] I should like some tea. I was looking forward to spending the whole evening in pleasant company and — *o, fallacem hominum spem!* . . . Accusative case after an interjection . . .

VERSHININ. Then I'll go somewhere by myself.

[*Exit with Kuligin, whistling*]

OLGA. I've such a headache . . . Andrei has been losing money . . . The whole town is talking . . . I'll go and lie down. [*Going*] I'm free to-morrow . . . Oh, my God, what a relief! I'm free to-morrow, I'm free the day after . . . Oh my head, my head . . . [*Exit*]

IRINA [*alone*] They've all gone. Nobody's left.

[*A concertina is being played in the street. The nurse sings*]

NATASHA [*in fur coat, and cap, steps across the living-room, followed by the maid*] I'll be back in half an hour. I'm only going for a little drive. [*Exit*]

IRINA [*alone in her misery*] To Moscow! Moscow! Moscow!

CURTAIN.

ACT THREE.

The room shared by Olga and Irina. Beds, screened off, back, right and left. It is a little after two in the morning. Back stage a fire-alarm is ringing; it has been going for some time. Nobody in the house has gone to bed yet. Masha is lying on a sofa dressed, as usual, in black. Enter Olga and Anfisa.

ANFISA. They are now sitting underneath the stairs. I said to them, "Won't you come up," I said, "you can't go on like this," and they simply cried, "We don't know where father is." They said, "He may be burnt up by now." What an idea! And in the yard there are some people . . . also undressed.

OLGA [*takes a dress out of the closet*] Take this gray dress . . . and this . . . and the blouse as well . . . Take the skirt, too, nurse . . . My God! How awful it is! The whole of the Kirsanovsky district seems to have burned down. Take this . . . and this . . . [*Throws clothes into her hands*] The poor Vershinins are so frightened. . . Their house was nearly burnt. They ought to come here for the night . . . They shouldn't be allowed to go home . . . Poor Fedotik has lost everything, there's nothing left . . .

ANFISA. Couldn't you call Ferapont, Olga dear? I can hardly manage . . .

OLGA [*rings*] They'll never answer . . . [*At the door*]

Come here, whoever it is! [*Through the open door is seen a window, red with flame; a fire-engine is heard passing the house*] How awful this is. And how sick I am of it! [*Ferapont enters*] Take these things down . . . The Kolotilin girls are below . . . and let them have them. This, too . . .

FERAPONT. Yes'm. In the year twelve Moscow, too, was in flames. God! The Frenchmen were surprised.

OLGA. Go on, go on . . .

FERAPONT. Yes'm. [*Exit*]

OLGA. Nurse, dear, give them all we have. We don't need anything. Give it all to them, nurse . . . I'm tired, I can hardly stand on my legs . . . The Vershinins mustn't be allowed to go home . . . The girls can sleep in the drawing-room, and Alexander Ignateievitch can go downstairs to the Baron's flat . . . Fedotik can go there, too, or else into our living-room . . . The doctor is drunk, beastly drunk, as if on purpose, so nobody can go to him. Vershinin's wife, too, may go into the drawing-room.

ANFISA [*tired*] Olga, dear girl, don't dismiss me! Don't dismiss me!

OLGA. You're talking nonsense, nurse. Nobody is dismissing you.

ANFISA [*puts Olga's head against her breast*] My dear, precious girl, I'm working, I'm toiling away . . . I'm growing weak, and they'll all say go away! And where shall I go? Where? I'm eighty. Eighty-one years old . . .

OLGA. You sit down, nurse dear . . . You're tired,

poor darling . . . [*Makes her sit down*] Rest, dear. You're so pale!

[*Natasha comes in*]

NATASHA. They say that a committee to assist the sufferers from the fire must be formed at once. What do you think of that? It's a splendid idea. Of course, the poor ought to be helped; it's the duty of the rich. Bobby and little Sophie are sleeping, sleeping as if nothing had happened. There's such a lot of people here, the place is full of them, wherever you go. There's influenza in the town now. I'm afraid the children will catch it.

OLGA [*not listening to her*] From this room we can't see the fire, it's peaceful here . . .

NATASHA. Yes . . . I suppose I'm all untidy. [*Before the looking-glass*] They say I'm growing stout . . . It isn't true! Certainly it isn't! Masha's asleep; the poor thing is tired out . . . [*Coldly, to Anfisa*] Don't dare sit down in my presence! Get up! Out of this! [*Exit Anfisa; a pause*] I don't understand what makes you keep that old woman!

OLGA [*confusedly*] Excuse me, I don't understand, either . . .

NATASHA. She's no good here. She comes from the country, she ought to live there . . . Spoiling her, I call it! I like order in the house! We don't want any unnecessary people here. [*Caresses her cheek*] You're tired, poor thing! Our head mistress is tired! And when my little Sophie grows up and goes to school I shall be so afraid of you.

OLGA. I shan't be head mistress.

NATASHA. They'll appoint you, Olga. It's settled.

OLGA. I'll refuse the post. I can't . . . I'm not strong enough . . . [*Drinks a glass of water*] You were so rude to nurse just now . . . I'm sorry. I can't stand it . . . everything seems dark before my eyes . . .

NATASHA [*excited*] Forgive me, Olga, forgive me . . . I didn't mean to hurt your feelings.

[*Masha gets up, takes a pillow and goes out angrily*]

OLGA. Try to understand, my dear . . . we have been brought up in an unusual way, perhaps, but I really can't stand it. Such behavior has a terrible effect on me, I get ill . . . It makes me so despondent!

NATASHA. Forgive me, forgive me . . . [*Kisses her*]

OLGA. The least bit of rudeness, the slightest discourtesy, upsets me.

NATASHA. I often say too much, it's true, but you must agree, dear, that she might just as well live in the country.

OLGA. She has been with us for thirty years.

NATASHA. But she can't do any work now. Either I don't understand you, or you don't want to understand me. She's not able to work, she only sleeps or sits around.

OLGA. Very well! Let her sit around!

NATASHA [*surprised*] What do you mean? She's only a servant. [*Crying*] I don't understand you, Olga. I've got a nurse, a wet-nurse, we've a cook, a housemaid . . . what do we want that old woman for as well? What good is she? [*Fire-alarm back stage*]

OLGA. I've grown ten years older to-night.

NATASHA. We must come to an agreement, Olga.

Your place is the school, mine—the home. You devote yourself to teaching, I, to the household. And if I talk about servants, then I know what I am talking about; I know what I am talking about . . . And to-morrow there's to be no more of that old thief, that old hag . . . [*Stamping her foot*] That witch! And don't you dare annoy me! Don't you dare! [*Stopping short*] Really, if you don't move downstairs, we shall always be quarreling. This is awful.

[*Enter Kuligin*]

KULIGIN. Where's Masha? It's time we went home. The fire seems to be burning out. [*Stretches himself*] Only one block has burnt down, but there was such a wind that it seemed at first the whole town was going up in flames. [*Sits*] I'm tired. My dear Olga . . . I often think that if it hadn't been for Masha, I should have married you. You are such a kindly girl . . . I am absolutely tired out. [*Listens*]

OLGA. What is it?

KULIGIN. The doctor, of course, has been drinking hard; he's terribly drunk. He might have done it on purpose! [*Gets up*] He seems to be coming here . . . Do you hear him? Yes, here . . . [*Laughs*] What a man . . . really . . . I'll hide. [*Goes to the closet, and hides in the corner*] What a scoundrel!

OLGA. He hasn't touched a drop for two years, and now he suddenly goes and gets drunk . . .

[*Retires with Natasha to the back of the room. Tchebutikin enters; apparently sober, he stops, looks round, then goes to the wash-stand and begins to wash his hands*]

TCHEBUTIKIN [*morosely*] Devil take them all . . . take them all . . . They think I'm a doctor and can cure everything, and I know absolutely nothing, I've forgotten all I ever knew, I remember nothing, absolutely nothing. [*Olga and Natasha leave, unnoticed by him*] Devil take it. Last Wednesday I attended a woman in Zosip — and she died, and it's my fault that she died. Yes . . . I used to know a certain amount five-and-twenty years ago, but I don't remember anything now. Nothing. Perhaps I'm not really a man, and am only pretending that I have arms and legs and a head; perhaps I don't exist at all, and only imagine that I walk, and eat, and sleep. [*Cries*] Oh, if only I didn't exist! [*Stops crying; morosely*] The devil only knows . . . Day before yesterday they were talking at the club; they mentioned Shakespeare, Voltaire . . . I've never read, never read at all, and I made believe as if I had. So did the others. Oh, how beastly! How petty! And then I remembered the woman whom I attended and who died on Wednesday . . . and I couldn't get her out of my thoughts, and everything in my soul turned crooked, nasty, wretched . . . So I drank to forget . . .

[*Irina, Vershinin and Tuzenbach enter; Tuzenbach is wearing new and fashionable civilian clothes*]

IRINA. Let's sit down. Nobody will come in here.

VERSHININ. The whole town would have been destroyed if it hadn't been for the soldiers. Good men! [*Rubs his hands appreciatively*] Splendid people! Oh, what a fine lot!

KULIGIN [*coming up to him*] What's the time?

TUZENBACH. It's after three now. Dawn is here.

IRINA. They are all sitting in the living-room, nobody thinks of leaving. And that Solyony of yours is sitting there . . . [*To Tchebutikin*] Hadn't you better go to sleep, doctor?

TCHEBUTIKIN. It's all right . . . thank you . . .
[*Combs his beard*]

KULIGIN [*laughs*] Your tongue is a bit thick, eh, Ivan Romanovitch! [*Pats him on the shoulder*] Good man! *In vino veritas*, the ancients used to say.

TUZENBACH. They keep on asking me to arrange a concert in aid of the sufferers.

IRINA. As if one could do anything . . .

TUZENBACH. It might be arranged, if necessary. In my opinion, Maria Sergeievna is an excellent pianist.

KULIGIN. Yes, excellent!

IRINA. She's forgotten everything. She hasn't played for three years . . . or four.

TUZENBACH. In this town absolutely nobody understands music, not a soul, except myself, and I assure you on my word of honor that Maria Sergeievna plays beautifully, almost with genius.

KULIGIN. You are right, Baron. I'm awfully fond of Masha. She's very fine.

TUZENBACH. To be able to play so beautifully and to realize at the same time that nobody, nobody can understand you!

KULIGIN [*sighs*] Yes . . . But is it proper for her to appear in a concert? [*Pause*] You see, I don't know anything! Perhaps it will be all right. I admit that

our director is a kindly fellow, very kindly indeed, very brainy. But his views are rather conventional . . . Of course it is none of his business but still, if you wish, perhaps I'd better talk to him.

[*Tchebutikin takes a porcelain clock into his hands and examines it*]

VERSHININ. I got so dirty during the fire, I don't look like anybody on earth. [*Pause*] Yesterday, I happened to overhear casually that they desire to transfer our brigade to some distant place. Some said to Poland, others, to Chita.

TUZENBACH. I heard so, too. Well, if it is so, the town will be quite empty.

IRINA. And we'll go away, too!

TCHEBUTIKIN [*drops the clock which breaks to pieces*]
To pieces!

[*A pause; everybody is pained and confused*]

KULIGIN [*gathering up the pieces*] To smash such an expensive thing! — Oh, Ivan Romanovitch, Ivan Romanovitch! You'll get a zero mark in behavior!

IRINA. That clock used to belong to our late mother.

TCHEBUTIKIN. Perhaps . . . To your mother, your mother. Perhaps I didn't break it; it only looks as if I broke it. Perhaps we only think that we exist, when really we don't. I don't know anything, nobody knows anything. [*At the door*] What are you looking at? Natasha has a little romance with Protopopoff, and you don't see it . . . There you sit and see nothing, and Natasha has a little romance with Protopopoff . . . [*Sings*] Won't you please accept this date . . . [*Exit*]

VERSHININ. Yes. [*Laughs*] How strange everything really is! [*Pause*] When the fire broke out, I hurried off home; when I get there I see the house is whole, uninjured, and in no danger, but my two girls are standing by the door in just their underclothes, their mother isn't there, the crowd is excited, horses and dogs are running about, and the girl's faces are so agitated, terrified, beseeching, and I don't know what else. My heart hurt me, when I saw those faces. My God, I thought, what these girls will have to put up with if they live long! I caught them up and ran, and still kept on thinking the one thing: what they will have to live through in this world! [*Fire-alarm; a pause*] I come here and find their mother shouting and angry. [*Masha enters with a pillow and sits on the sofa*] And when my girls were standing by the door in just their underclothes, and the street was red from the fire, there was a dreadful noise, and I thought that something of the sort used to happen many years ago when an enemy made a sudden attack, and looted, and burned . . . And at the same time what a difference there really is between the present and the past! And when a little more time has gone by, in two or three hundred years perhaps, people will look at our present life with just the same fear, and the same contempt, and the whole past will seem clumsy and dull, and very uncomfortable, and strange. Oh, indeed, what a life there will be, what a life! [*Laughs*] Forgive me, I've dropped into philosophy again. Please let me continue. I do long to philosophize, I'm in just that sort of mood. [*Pause*] As if they are all asleep. As I was saying: what a life

there will be! Only just imagine . . . There are only three persons like yourselves in the town just now, but in future generations there will be more and more, and still more, and the time will come when everything will change and become as you would have it, people will live as you do, and then you, too, will go out of date; people will be born who are better than you . . . [*Laughs*] Yes, to-day, I am in a most peculiar mood. I am devilishly keen on living . . . [*Sings*] "The power of love is known to all the world, Great good grows out of it—" [*Laughs*]

MASHA. Tra-ta-ta? . . .

VERSHININ. Tra-ta-ta . . .

MASHA. Tra-ra-ram-tam-tam?

VERSHININ. Tra-ra-ram-tam-tam. [*Laughs*]

[*Enter Fedotik*]

FEDOTIK [*dancing*] I'm burnt out, I'm burnt out! Down to the ground! [*Laughter*]

IRINA. I don't see anything funny about it. Is everything burnt?

FEDOTIK [*laughs*] Absolutely. Nothing left at all. The guitar's burnt, and the photographs are burnt, and all my correspondence . . . And I was going to make you a present of a note-book, and that's burnt, too.

[*Solyony comes in*]

IRINA. No, you can't come here, Vassily Vassilievitch. Please go away.

SOLYONY. Why can the Baron come here and not I?

VERSHININ. We really must go. How's the fire?

SOLYONY. They say it's dying down. No, I absolutely

don't see why the Baron can, and not I! [*Scents his hands*]

VERSHININ. Tra-ra-ram-tam-tam?

MASHA. Tra-ra-ram-tam-tam.

VERSHININ [*laughs to Solyony*] Let's go into the living-room.

SOLYONY. Very well, we'll make a note of it. "If I should try to make this clear, the geese would be annoyed, I fear." [*Looks at Tuzenbach*] There, there, there . . .

[*Goes out with Vershinin and Fedotik*]

IRINA. How Solyony smoked! . . . [*In surprise*]
The Baron's asleep! Baron! Baron!

TUZENBACH [*waking*] I am tired, I must say . . .
The brickworks . . . No, I'm not raving, I mean it;
I'm going to start work soon at the brickworks . . .
I've already talked it over. [*Tenderly, to Irina*] You're
so pale, and beautiful, and charming . . . Your paleness
pierces the dark air like light . . . You are sad, dis-
pleased with life . . . Oh, come with me, let's go and
work together!

MASHA. Nikolai Lvovitch, go away from here.

TUZENBACH [*laughs*] Are you here? I didn't see you.
[*Kisses Irina's hand*] Good-bye, I'm going . . . I look
at you now and I remember, as if it was long ago, your
birthday when you, cheerfully and merrily, were talking
about the joys of labor! . . . And how happy life seemed
to me, then! What has happened to it now? [*Kisses
her hand*] There are tears in your eyes. Go to bed now;
it is already daybreak . . . morning is here . . . If
only I was allowed to give my life for you!

MASHA. Nikolai Lvovitch, go away! Really —

TUZENBACH. I'm off. [*Exit*]

MASHA [*lies down*] Are you asleep, Fyodor?

KULIGIN. Eh?

MASHA. Shouldn't you go home?

KULIGIN. My dear Masha, my darling Masha . . .

IRINA. She's tired. You might let her rest, Fedia.

KULIGIN. I'll go at once. My wife is good, fine . . .

I love you, my only one . . .

MASHA [*angrily*] *Amo, amas, amat, amamus, amatis, amant.*

KULIGIN [*laughs*] No, she is really wonderful. I've been your husband seven years, and it seems as if I married only yesterday. On my word. No, you really are a wonderful woman. I'm pleased, I'm pleased, I'm pleased!

MASHA. I'm bored, I'm bored, I'm bored . . . [*Sits up*] But I can't get it out of my head . . . It's simply disgraceful. It has been gnawing away at me . . . I can't keep silent. I mean about Andrei . . . He has mortgaged this house at the bank . . . and his wife has all the money; but the house doesn't belong to him alone, but to the four of us! He ought to know that, if he's an honorable man.

KULIGIN. What's the use, Masha? Andrei is in debt all round; well, let him do as he pleases.

MASHA. It's disgraceful, anyway. [*Lies down*]

KULIGIN. You and I are not poor. I work, teach my classes, give private lessons . . . I am a plain, honest man . . . *Omnia mea mecum porto*, as they say.

MASHA. I don't want anything, but the unfairness of it disgusts me. [*Pause*] You go, Fyodor.

KULIGIN [*kisses her*] You are tired, just rest for half an hour, and I'll sit and wait for you. Sleep . . . [*Going*] I'm pleased, I'm pleased, I'm pleased . . . [*Exit*]

IRINA. Yes, really, our Andrei has lost weight; how mediocre and old and trite he has become through that woman's influence! Really — formerly he wished to be a professor, and yesterday he was boasting that at last he had been made a member of the district council. He is a member, and Protopopoff is chairman . . . The whole town talks and laughs about it, and he alone knows and sees nothing . . . And now everybody's gone to watch the fire, but he sits alone in his room and pays no attention, only just plays on his violin. [*Nervously*] Oh, it's awful, awful, awful. [*Weeps*] I can't, I can't bear it any longer! . . . I can't, I can't! . . .

[*Olga comes in and puts in order her little table. Irina is sobbing loudly*] Throw me out, throw me out, I can't bear any more!

OLGA [*alarmed*] What is it, what is it? Dear!

IRINA [*sobbing*] Where? Where has everything gone? Where is it all? Oh, my God, my God! I've forgotten everything, everything . . . I don't remember what is the Italian for window, or, well, for ceiling . . . I forget everything, every day I forget it, and life passes and will never return, and we'll never go to Moscow . . . I see that we'll never go . . .

OLGA. Dear, dear . . .

IRINA [*controlling herself*] Oh, I am unhappy . . . I can't work, I shan't work. Enough, enough! I used to be a telegraph operator, now I work at the town council offices, and I have nothing but hate and contempt for all they give me to do . . . I am already twenty-three, I have already been at work for a long while, and my brain has dried up, and I've grown thin, plain, old, and there is no relief of any sort, and time goes and it seems all the while as if I were going away from the real, the beautiful life, farther and farther away, down some precipice. I'm in despair and I can't understand how it is that I am still alive, that I haven't killed myself.

OLGA. Don't cry, dear girl, don't cry . . . I suffer, too.

IRINA. I'm not crying, not crying . . . Enough . . . Look, I'm not crying any more. Enough . . . enough!

OLGA. Dear, I tell you as a sister and a friend, if you care for my advice, marry the Baron. [*Irina cries softly*] You respect him, you think highly of him . . . It is true that he is not handsome, but he is so honorable and clean . . . people don't marry for love, but for the sake of duty. I think so, at any rate, and I'd marry without being in love. Whoever he is, I should marry him, as long as he is a decent man. Even if he is old . . .

IRINA. I was always waiting until we should be settled in Moscow; there I would have met my true love; I used to dream of him, and love him . . . But it's all turned out to be nonsense, all nonsense . . .

OLGA [*embraces her sister*] My dear, beautiful sister, I understand everything; when Baron Nikolai Lvovitch

left the army and came to us in correct dress, he seemed so bad-looking to me that I even started crying . . . He asked, "What are you crying for?" How could I tell him! But if God meant him to marry you, I would be happy. That would be different, quite different.

[*Natasha with a candle walks across the stage from right to left without speaking*]

MASHA [*sitting up*] She walks as if she had set something on fire.

OLGA. Masha, you're silly, you're the silliest of the family. Please forgive me for saying so. [*Pause*]

MASHA. I must make a confession, dear sisters. My soul is in pain. I will confess to you, and never again to anybody . . . I'll tell you this minute. [*Softly*] It's my secret but you must know everything . . . I can't be silent . . . [*Pause*] I love, I love . . . I love that man . . . You saw him only just now . . . Why don't I say it . . . in one word. I love Vershinin.

OLGA [*goes behind her screen*] Stop that, I won't even listen to you!

MASHA. What am I to do? [*Takes her head in her hands*] First he seemed queer to me, then I was sorry for him . . . then I fell in love with him . . . fell in love with his voice, his words, his misfortune, his two daughters.

OLGA [*behind the screen*] I'm not listening. You may talk any nonsense you like, it will be all the same, I shan't hear.

MASHA. Oh, Olga, you are foolish. I am in love—that means that is to be my fate. It means that is to be my lot . . . And he loves me . . . It is all awful. Yes;

it isn't good, is it? [*Takes Irina's hand and draws her to her*] Oh, my dear . . . How are we to go through with our lives, what is to become of us? . . . When you read a novel it all seems so easy and plain, but when you fall in love yourself, then you learn that nobody knows anything, and each must decide for himself . . . My dear ones, my sisters . . . I've confessed, now I shall keep silence . . . Like the lunatics in Gogol's story, I'm going to be silent . . . silent . . .

[*Andrei enters, followed by Ferapont*]

ANDREI [*angrily*] What do you want? I don't understand.

FERAPONT [*at the door, impatiently*] I've already told you ten times, Andrei Sergeievitch.

ANDREI. In the first place I'm not Andrei Sergeievitch, but your honor.

FERAPONT. The firemen, sir, ask if they can cut across your garden to the river. Else they have to go all the way round, all the way round; it's a nuisance.

ANDREI. All right. Tell them it's all right. [*Exit Ferapont*] I'm tired of them. Where is Olga? [*Olga comes out from behind the screen*] I came to you for the key of the closet. I lost my own. You have a little key. [*Olga gives him the key; Irina goes behind her screen; pause*] What a huge fire! It's going down now. Hang it all, that Ferapont made me so angry that I talked nonsense to him . . . Your honor, indeed . . . [*A pause*] Why are you so silent, Olga? [*Pause*] It's time you stopped all that nonsense and behaved as if you were properly alive . . . You are here, Masha. Irina is here. Well, since we're all here, let's come to a complete under-

standing, once and for all. What have you against me? What is it?

OLGA. Please don't, Andrei dear. We'll talk to-morrow. [*Excited*] What an awful night!

ANDREI [*much confused*] Don't excite yourself. I ask you in perfect calmness; what have you against me? Tell me straight.

VERSHININ'S VOICE. Tra-ra-ram-tam-tam!

MASHA [*stands; loudly*] Tra-ta-ta! [*To Olga*] Good-bye, Olga, God bless you. [*Goes behind screen and kisses Irina*] Sleep well . . . Good-bye, Andrei. Go away now, they're tired . . . you can explain to-morrow . . . [*Exit*]

OLGA. Let's postpone this until to-morrow, Andrei! [*Goes behind the screen*] It's time to go to bed.

ANDREI. I'll only say this and go. At once . . . In the first place, you have something against Natasha, my wife; I've noticed it since the very day of my marriage. Natasha is a beautiful and honest creature, straight and honorable — that's my opinion. I love and respect my wife; understand it, I respect her, and I insist that others respect her, too. I repeat, she's an honest and honorable person, and all your disapproval is simply silly . . . [*Pause*] In the second place, you seem to be annoyed because I am not a professor, and am not engaged in study. But I work for the zemstvo, I am a member of the district council, and I consider my service as worthy and as high as the service of science. I am a member of the district council, and I am proud of it, if you want to know . . . [*Pause*] In the third place, I have still this to say . . . that I have mortgaged the house without ob-

taining your permission . . . For that I am to blame, and ask to be forgiven. My debts led me into doing it . . . thirty-five thousand . . . I do not play at cards any more, I stopped long ago, but the chief thing I have to say in my defense is that you girls receive a pension, and I don't . . . my wages, so to speak . . . [*Pause*]

KULIGIN [*at the door*] Is Masha there? [*Excitedly*] Where is she? It's queer . . . [*Exit*]

ANDREI. They don't hear. Natasha is a splendid, honest person. [*Walks about in silence, then stops*] When I married I thought we should be happy . . . all of us . . . But, my God . . . [*Weeps*] My dear, dear sisters, don't believe me, don't believe me . . . [*Exit*]

[*Fire-alarm. The stage is empty*]

IRINA [*behind her screen*] Olga, who's knocking on the floor?

OLGA. It's Doctor Ivan Romanovitch. He's drunk.

IRINA. What a restless night! [*Pause*] Olga! [*Looks out*] Did you hear? They are taking the brigade away from us; it's going to be transferred to some place far away.

OLGA. It's only a rumor.

IRINA. Then we shall be left alone . . . Olga!

OLGA. Well?

IRINA. My dear, darling sister, I esteem, I highly value the Baron, he's a splendid man; I'll marry him, I'll consent, only let's go to Moscow! I implore you, let's go! There's nothing better than Moscow on earth! Let's go, Olga, let's go!

CURTAIN.

ACT FOUR.

The old garden at the house of the Prozoroffs. There is a long avenue of firs, at the end of which the river can be seen. There is a forest on the far side of the river. On the right is the terrace of the house: bottles and tumblers are on a table here; it is evident that champagne has just been drunk. It is midday. Every now and again passers-by walk across the garden, from the road to the river; five soldiers go past rapidly. Tchebutikin, in a comfortable frame of mind which does not desert him throughout the act, sits in an armchair in the garden, waiting to be called. He wears a peaked cap and has a stick. Irina, Kuligin with a cross hanging from his neck and without his mustaches, and Tuzenbach are standing on the terrace seeing off Fedotik and Rode, who are coming down into the garden; both officers are in service uniform.

TUZENBACH [*exchanges kisses with Fedotik*] You're a good sort, we got on so well together. [*Exchanges kisses with Rode*] Once again . . . Good-bye, old man!

IRINA. Au revoir!

FEDOTIK. It isn't au revoir, it's good-bye; we'll never meet again!

KULIGIN. Who knows! [*Wipes his eyes; smiles*] Here I've started crying!

IRINA. We'll meet again sometime.

FEDOTIK. After ten years — or fifteen? We'll hardly

know one another then; we'll say, "How do you do?" coldly . . . [*Takes a snapshot*] Keep still . . . Once more, for the last time.

RODE [*embracing Tuzenbach*] We shan't meet again . . . [*Kisses Irina's hand*] Thank you for everything, for everything!

FEDOTIK [*grieved*] Don't be in such a hurry!

TUZENBACH. We shall meet again, if God wills it. Write to us. Be sure to write.

RODE [*looking round the garden*] Good-bye, trees! [*Shouts*] Yo-ho! [*Pause*] Good-bye, echo!

KULIGIN. Best wishes. Go and get yourselves wives there in Poland . . . Your Polish wife will embrace you and call you "kochanku!" [*Laughs*]

FEDOTIK [*looking at the time*] There's less than an hour left. Solyony is the only one of our battery who is going on the barge; the rest of us are going with the main body. Three batteries are leaving to-day, another three to-morrow and then the town will be quiet and peaceful.

TUZENBACH. And terribly dull.

RODE. And where is Maria Sergeievna?

KULIGIN. Masha is in the garden.

FEDOTIK. We'd like to say good-bye to her.

RODE. Good-bye, I must go, or else I'll commence weeping . . . [*Quickly embraces Kuligin and Tuzenbach, and kisses Irina's hand*] We've been so happy here . . .

FEDOTIK [*to Kuligin*] Here's a keepsake for you . . . a note-book with a pencil . . . We'll go to the river from here . . . [*They go aside and both look round*]

RODE [*shouts*] Yo-ho!

KULIGIN [*shouts*] Good-bye.

[*In the background Fedotik and Rode meet Masha; they say good-bye and go out with her*]

IRINA. They've gone . . . [*Sits on the bottom step of the terrace*]

TCHEBUTIKIN. And they forgot to say good-bye to me.

IRINA. Why so?

TCHEBUTIKIN. I just forgot, somehow. Though I shall see them again soon. I'm going to-morrow. Yes . . . just one day left. I shall be retired in a year, then I'll come here again and finish my life near you. I've only one year before I receive my pension . . . [*Puts one newspaper into his pocket and takes out another*] I'll come here to you and change my life radically . . . I'll be so quiet . . . so agree . . . agreeable, respectable . . .

IRINA. Yes, you ought to change your life, dear man, somehow or other.

TCHEBUTIKIN. Yes, I feel it. [*Sings softly*] "Tarara-boom-deay . . ."

KULIGIN. We won't reform Ivan Romanovitch! We won't reform him!

TCHEBUTIKIN. If only you would teach me how! Then I would reform!

IRINA. Fyodor has shaved his mustache! I can't bear to look at him.

KULIGIN. Well, what about it?

TCHEBUTIKIN. I could tell you what your face looks like now, but it wouldn't be polite.

KULIGIN. Well! It's the custom, it's the *modus vivendi*. Our Director is clean-shaven, and so I, too, when I received my inspectorship, had my mustaches removed. Nobody likes it, but it's all the same to me. I'm satisfied. Whether I have mustaches or not, I'm satisfied . . . [*Sits*]

[*In the background Andrei is wheeling a perambulator with a sleeping child*]

IRINA. Ivan Romanovitch, be a darling. I'm awfully worried. You were out on the boulevard last night; tell me, what happened?

TCHEBUTIKIN. What happened? Nothing. Quite a trifling matter. [*Reads paper*] Of no importance!

KULIGIN. They say that Solyony and the Baron met yesterday on the boulevard near the theatre . . .

TUZENBACH. Stop! Really — [*Waves his hand and goes into the house*]

KULIGIN. Near the theatre . . . Solyony behaved offensively to the Baron, who lost his temper and said something nasty . . .

TCHEBUTIKIN. I don't know. It's all nonsense.

KULIGIN. At some seminary or other a master wrote "nonsense" on an essay, and the student couldn't make the letters out — thought it was some sort of a Latin word. [*Laughs*] Awfully funny, that. They say that Solyony is in love with Irina and hates the Baron . . . That's quite natural. Irina is a very nice girl. She's like Masha. She's so pensive . . . Only, Irina, your character is more gentle. Though Masha's character, too, is very good. I'm very fond of Masha.

[Shouts of "Yo-ho!" are heard behind the stage]

IRINA [*shudders*] Everything seems to frighten me to-day. [*Pause*] I have everything ready, and I send my things off after dinner. The Baron and I will be married to-morrow, and to-morrow we go away to the brick-works, and the next day I go to the school, and the new life begins. God will help me! When I took my examination for the teacher's post, I actually wept for joy and gratitude . . . [*Pause*] The cart will be here in a minute for my things . . .

KULIGIN. Somehow or other, all this doesn't seem at all real. As if it were all ideas, and nothing really actual. Still, with all my soul I wish you happiness.

TCHEBUTIKIN [*with deep feeling*] My splendid . . . my dear, precious girl . . . You've made some progress, I won't catch up with you. I'm left behind like a migrant bird grown old, and unable to fly. Fly, my dear, fly, and God be with you! [*Pause*] It's a pity you shaved your mustaches, Fyodor Ilyitch.

KULIGIN. Oh, forget it! [*Sighs*] To-day the soldiers will be gone, and everything will continue as in the old days. Say what you will, Masha is a good, honest woman. I love her very much, and am grateful for my fate. People have such different fates. There's a Kosireff who works in the excise department here. He was at school with me; he was expelled from the fifth class of the High School for being entirely unable to understand *ut consecutivum*. He's awfully hard up now and in very poor health, and when I meet him I say to him, "How do you do, *ut consecutivum*." "Yes," he

says, "precisely *consecutivum* . . ." and coughs. But I've been successful all my life, I'm happy, and I even have a Stanislaus Cross, of the second class, and now I myself teach others that *ut consecutivum*. Of course, I'm a clever man, much cleverer than many, but happiness doesn't lie only in that. . . .

[*"The Maiden's Prayer" is being played on the piano in the house*]

IRINA. To-morrow night I shan't hear that "Maiden's Prayer" any more, and I shan't be meeting Protopopoff. [*Pause*] Protopopoff is sitting there in the drawing room; and he came to-day . . .

KULIGIN. Hasn't the head-mistress come yet?

IRINA. No. She has been sent for. If you only knew how difficult it is for me to live alone, without Olga . . . She lives at the High School; she, a head-mistress, busy all day with her affairs and I'm alone, bored, with nothing to do, and hate the room I live in . . . I've made up my mind: if I can't live in Moscow, then it must come to this. It's fate. It can't be helped. It's all the will of God, that's the truth. Nikolai Lvovitch proposed to me. Well? I thought it over and accepted. He's a good man . . . it's quite remarkable how good he is . . . And suddenly my soul took wings, I became happy, and light-hearted, and once again the desire for work, work, came over me . . . Only something happened yesterday, some secret dread has been hanging over me . . .

TCHEBUTIKIN. Rubbish. Nonsense.

NATASHA [*at the window*] The head-mistress.

KULIGIN. The head-mistress is here. Let's go.
[*Exit with Irina into the house*]

TCHEBUTIKIN [*reads his paper and hums softly*] . . .
"Tara-ra . . . boom-deay."

[*Masha approaches, Andrei is wheeling a perambulator in the background*]

MASHA. Here you sit, doing nothing.

TCHEBUTIKIN. What then?

MASHA [*sits*] Nothing . . . [*Pause*] Did you love my mother?

TCHEBUTIKIN. Very much.

MASHA. And did she love you?

TCHEBUTIKIN [*after a pause*] I don't remember that.

MASHA. Is my man here? When our cook Martha used to ask about her policeman, she called him "my man." Is he here?

TCHEBUTIKIN. Not yet.

MASHA. When you take your happiness in little bits, in snatches, and then lose it, as I have done, you gradually grow coarser, more bitter. [*Points to her breast*] I'm boiling in here . . . [*Looks at Andrei with the perambulator*] There's our brother Andrei . . . All our hopes in him have gone. There was once a great bell, a thousand persons were hoisting it, much money and labor had been spent on it, when it suddenly fell and was broken. Suddenly, for no particular reason . . . Andrei is like that . . .

ANDREI. When are they going to stop making such a noise in the house? It's awful.

TCHEBUTIKIN. They won't be much longer. [*Looks*

at his watch] My watch is very old-fashioned, it strikes the hours . . . [*Winds the watch and makes it strike*] The first, second, and fifth batteries are to leave at one o'clock precisely. [*Pause*] And I go to-morrow.

ANDREI. Forever?

TCHEBUTIKIN. I don't know. Perhaps I'll return in a year. The devil only knows . . . it's all one . . . [*Somewhere a harp and violin are being played*]

ANDREI. The town will grow empty. It will be as if they put a cover over it. [*Pause*] Something happened yesterday near the theatre. The whole town knows of it, but I don't.

TCHEBUTIKIN. Nothing. A silly little affair. Solyony annoyed the Baron, who lost his temper and insulted him, and so at last Solyony had to challenge him. [*Looks at his watch*] It's about time, I think . . . At half-past twelve, in the public wood, the one you can see from here across the river . . . Piff-paff. [*Laughs*] Solyony thinks he's Lermontoff, and even writes verses. That's all very well, but this is his third duel.

MASHA. Whose?

TCHEBUTIKIN. Solyony's.

MASHA. And the Baron?

TCHEBUTIKIN. What about the Baron? [*Pause*]

MASHA. Everything's all muddled up in my head . . . But I say it should not be allowed. He might wound the Baron or even kill him.

TCHEBUTIKIN. The Baron is a good man, but one Baron more or less — what difference does it make? It's

all the same! [*Beyond the garden somebody shouts "Co-ee! Hallo!"*] You wait. That's Skvortsoff shouting; one of the seconds. He's in a boat. [*Pause*]

ANDREI. In my opinion it's simply immoral to fight a duel, or to witness one, even in the quality of a doctor.

TCHEBUTIKIN. It only seems so . . . We don't exist, there's nothing on earth, we don't really live, it only seems that we live. Does it matter, anyway!

MASHA. You talk and talk the whole day long . . . [*Going*] You live in a climate like this, where it might snow any moment, and there you talk . . . [*Stops*] I won't go into the house, I can't . . . [*Goes along the avenue*] The migrant birds are already on the wing . . . [*Looks up*] Swans or geese. My dear, happy things . . . [*Exit*]

ANDREI. Our house will be empty. The officers will go away, you are going, my sister is getting married, and I alone will remain in the house.

TCHEBUTIKIN. What about your wife?

[*Ferapont enters with some documents*]

ANDREI. A wife's a wife. She's honest, well-bred, yes, and kind, but with all that there is still something about her that degenerates her into a petty, blind, even in some respects misshapen animal. In any case, she isn't a human being. I tell you as a friend, as the only man to whom I can lay bare my soul. I love Natasha, it's true, but sometimes she seems extraordinarily vulgar, and then I lose myself and can't understand why I love her so much, or, at any rate, used to love her . . .

TCHEBUTIKIN [*rises*] I'm going away to-morrow, old

chap, and perhaps we'll never meet again, so here's my advice. Put on your cap, take a stick in your hand, go . . . go on and on, without looking round. And the farther you go, the better.

[*Solyony goes across the back of the stage with two officers; he catches sight of Tchebutikin, and turns to him, the officers go on*]

SOLYONY. Doctor, it's time. It's half-past twelve already. [*Shakes hands with Andrei*]

TCHEBUTIKIN. Half a minute. I'm tired of the lot of you. [*To Andrei*] If anybody asks for me, say I'll be back soon . . . [*Sighs*] Oh, oh, oh!

SOLYONY. "He didn't have the time to sigh. The bear sat on him heavily." [*Goes up to him*] What are you groaning for, old man?

TCHEBUTIKIN. Stop it!

SOLYONY. How's your health?

TCHEBUTIKIN [*angry*] As smooth as oil!

SOLYONY. The old man is unnecessarily excited. I won't go far, I'll just bring him down like a snipe. [*Takes out his scent-bottle and scents his hands*] I've poured out a whole bottle of scent to-day and they still smell . . . of a dead body. [*Pause*] Yes . . . You remember the poem

"But he, the rebel seeks the storm,
As if the storm will bring him rest . . ."?"

TCHEBUTIKIN. Yes.

"He didn't have the time to sigh,
The bear sat on him heavily."

[Exit with Solyony. Shouts are heard. Andrei and Ferapont come in]

FERAPONT. Documents to sign . . .

ANDREI [irritated] Go away! Leave me! Please!
[Goes away with the perambulator]

FERAPONT. That's what documents are for, to be signed.

[Retires to back of stage. Enter Irina, with Tuzenbach in a straw hat; Kuligin walks across the stage, shouting, "Co-ee, Masha, co-ee!"]

TUZENBACH. He seems to be the only man in the town who is glad that the soldiers are going.

IRINA. One can understand that. [Pause] The town will be empty.

TUZENBACH. My dear, I shall return soon.

IRINA. Where are you going?

TUZENBACH. I must go into the town and then . . . see the others off.

IRINA. It's not true . . . Nikolai, why are you so absent-minded to-day? [Pause] What happened near the theatre yesterday?

TUZENBACH [making an impatient gesture] In an hour I shall return and be with you again. [Kisses her hands] My darling . . . [Looking her closely in the face] It's five years now since I fell in love with you, and still I can't get used to it, and you seem to me to grow more and more beautiful. What lovely, wonderful hair! What eyes! I'm going to take you away to-morrow. We shall work, we shall be rich, my dreams

will come true. You will be happy. There's only one thing, one thing only: you don't love me!

IRINA. It isn't in my power! I shall be your wife, I shall be true to you, and obedient, but I can't love you. What can I do! [*Cries*] I have never been in love in my life. Oh, I used to think so much of love. I have been thinking about it for so long, day and night, but my soul is like a costly piano which is locked, and the key lost. [*Pause*] You seem so unhappy.

TUZENBACH. I didn't sleep all night. There is nothing in my life so awful as to frighten me, only that lost key torments my soul and won't let me sleep. Say something to me. [*Pause*] Say something to me. . . .

IRINA. What can I say, what?

TUZENBACH. Anything.

IRINA. Don't! Don't! [*Pause*]

TUZENBACH. It is curious how silly trivial little things, sometimes for no apparent reason, seem to matter suddenly. At first you laugh at them, you think they are of no importance, you go on and you feel that you have not the strength to control yourself. Oh don't let's talk about it! I am happy. It is as if for the first time in my life I see these firs, maples, beeches, and they all look at me inquisitively and wait. What beautiful trees and when you come to think of it, how beautiful life must be near them! [*A shout of "co-ee!" in the distance*] It's time I went . . . There's a tree which has dried up but it still sways in the breeze with the others. And so it seems to me that if I die, I shall still take part in life one way or another. Good-bye, dear

. . . [*Kisses her hands*] The papers which you gave me are on my table under the calendar.

IRINA. I am coming with you.

TUZENBACH [*nervously*] No, no! [*He goes quickly and stops in the avenue*] Irina!

IRINA. What is it?

TUZENBACH [*not knowing what to say*] I haven't had any coffee to-day. Tell them to make me some . . .

[*He goes out quickly. Irina stands deep in thought. Then she goes to the back of the stage and sits on a swing. Andrei comes in with the perambulator and Ferapont also appears*]

FERAPONT. Andrei Sergeievitch, it isn't as if the documents were mine, they are the government's. I didn't make them.

ANDREI. Oh, what has become of my past and where is it? I used to be young, happy, clever, I used to be able to think and frame clever ideas, the present and the future seemed to me full of hope. Why do we, almost before we have begun to live, become dull, gray, uninteresting, lazy, apathetic, useless, unhappy? . . . This town has already been in existence for two hundred years and it has a hundred thousand inhabitants, not one of whom is in any way different from the others. There has never been, now or at any other time, a single leader of men, a single scholar, an artist, a man of even the slightest eminence who might arouse envy or a passionate desire to be emulated. They only eat, drink, sleep, and then they die . . . more people are born and also eat, drink, sleep, and so as not to become half-witted

out of sheer boredom, they try to make life many-sided with their beastly back-biting, vodka, cards, and litigation. The wives deceive their husbands, and the husbands lie, and pretend they see nothing and hear nothing, and the evil influence irresistibly oppresses the children and the divine spark in them is extinguished, and they become just as pitiful corpses and just as much like one another as their fathers and mothers . . . [*Angrily to Ferapont*] What do you want?

FERAPONT. What? Documents want signing.

ANDREI. I'm tired of you.

FERAPONT [*handing him papers*] The hall-porter from the law courts said just now that in the winter there were two hundred degrees of frost in Petersburg.

ANDREI. The present is beastly, but when I think of the future, how good it is! I feel so light, so free; there is a light in the distance, I see freedom. I see myself and my children freeing ourselves from vanities, from kvass, from goose baked with cabbage, from after-dinner naps, from base idleness . . .

FERAPONT. He said that two thousand people were frozen to death. The people were frightened, he said. In Petersburg or Moscow, I don't remember where.

ANDREI [*overcome by a tender emotion*] My dear sisters, my beautiful sisters! [*Crying*] Masha, my sister. . . .

NATASHA [*at the window*] Who's talking so loudly out there? Is that you, Andrei? You'll wake little Sophie. *Il ne faut pas faire du bruit, Sophie dort déjà. Vous êtes un ours.* [*Angrily*] If you want to talk, then

give the perambulator and the baby to somebody else. Ferapont, take the perambulator!

FERAPONT. Yes'm. [*Takes the perambulator*]

ANDREI [*confused*] I'm speaking quietly.

NATASHA [*at the window, nursing her boy*] Bobby! Naughty Bobby! Bad little Bobby!

ANDREI [*looking through the papers*] All right, I'll look them over and sign if necessary, and you can take them back to the office. . . . [*Goes into house reading papers; Ferapont takes the perambulator to the back of the garden*]

NATASHA [*at the window*] Bobby, what's your mother's name? Dear, dear! And who's this? That's Aunt Olga. Say to your aunt, "How do you do, Olga!"

[*Two wandering musicians, a man and a girl, are playing on a violin and a harp. Vershinin, Olga, and Anfisa come out of the house and listen for a minute in silence; Irina walks up to them*]

OLGA. Our garden might be a public thoroughfare, from the way people walk and ride across it. Nurse, give something to those musicians!

ANFISA [*gives money to the musicians*] Go away with God's blessing! [*The musicians bow and go away*] A bitter sort of people. You don't play on a full stomach. [*To Irina*] How do you do, Irisha! [*Kisses her*] Well, little girl, here I am, still alive! Still alive! In the High School, together with little Olga, in her official apartments . . . so the Lord has appointed for my old age. Sinful woman that I am, I've never lived like that in my life before . . . A large flat, government prop-

erty, and I've a whole room and bed to myself. All government property. I wake up at night and, oh God, and Holy Mother, there isn't a happier person than I!

VERSHININ [*looks at his watch*] We are going soon, Olga Sergeievna. It's time for me to go. [*Pause*] I wish you all happiness — all happiness . . . Where's Maria Sergeievna?

IRINA. She's somewhere in the garden. I'll go and look for her.

VERSHININ. If you'll be so kind. I haven't time.

ANFISA. I'll go and look, too. [*Shouts*] Little Masha, co-ee! [*Goes out with Irina down into the garden*] Co-ee, co-ee!

VERSHININ. Everything comes to an end. And so we, too, must part. [*Looks at his watch*] The town gave us a sort of farewell breakfast, we had champagne to drink and the mayor made a speech, and I ate and listened, but my soul was here all the time . . . [*Looks round the garden*] I have grown so used to you now.

OLGA. Shall we ever meet again?

VERSHININ. Probably not. [*Pause*] My wife and both my daughters will stay here another two months. If anything happens, or if anything has to be done . . .

OLGA. Yes, yes, of course. You need not worry. [*Pause*] To-morrow there won't be a single soldier left in the town, it will all be a memory, and, of course, for us a new life will begin . . . [*Pause*] None of our plans are coming right. I didn't wish to be a head-mistress, but they made me one, all the same. It means there's no chance to go to Moscow . . .

VERSHININ. Well . . . thank you for everything. Forgive me if I've . . . I've said such an awful lot—forgive me for that, too, don't think badly of me.

OLGA [*wipes her eyes*] Why isn't Masha coming? . . .

VERSHININ. What else can I say in parting? Can I philosophize about anything? [*Laughs*] Life is heavy. To many of us it seems dull and hopeless, but still, it must be acknowledged that it is getting lighter and clearer, and it seems that the time is not far off when it will be quite clear. [*Looks at his watch*] It's time I went! Mankind used to be absorbed in wars, and all its existence was filled with campaigns, attacks, defeats. Now we've outlived all that, leaving after us a great waste, which we cannot fill at present; but mankind is looking for something, and will certainly find it. Oh, if it only happened more quickly. [*Pause*] If only education could be added to industry, and industry to education. [*Looks at his watch*] It's time I went . . .

OLGA. Here she comes.

[*Enter Masha*]

VERSHININ. I came to say good-by. . . .

[*Olga steps aside a little, so as not to be in their way*]

MASHA [*looking him in the face*] Good-bye . . . [*She gives him a lingering kiss*]

OLGA. Enough! Enough! [*Masha breaks into tears*]

VERSHININ. Write to me . . . Don't forget! Let me go . . . it's time. Take her away, Olga Sergeievna . . . it's time . . . I'm late . . .

[*He kisses Olga's hand in evident emotion, then embraces Masha once more and goes out quickly*]

OLGA. Don't, Masha! Stop, dear . . . [*Kuligin enters*]

KULIGIN [*confused*] Never mind, let her cry, let her . . . My dear Masha, my good Masha . . . You're my wife, and I'm happy, whatever happens . . . I'm not complaining, I don't reproach you at all . . . Olga is a witness to it . . . Let's begin to live again as we used to, and not by a single word, or hint . . .

MASHA [*restraining her sobs*]

"A green oak stands by the sea,
A chain of gold around it . . .
A chain of gold around it . . .

I'm going out of my head . . . "a green oak stands . . . by the sea" . . .

OLGA. Be quiet, Masha, be quiet! . . . give her some water . . .

MASHA. I'm not crying any more.

KULIGIN. She's not crying any more . . . she's kindly . . .

[*A shot is heard from a far distance*]

MASHA. "A green oak stands by the sea,
A chain of gold around it . . .
A green cat — a green oak —

I'm mixing it up . . . [*Drinks some water*] Life is dull . . . There's nothing more now that I desire . . . I'll be all right in a moment . . . It doesn't matter . . . What do these lines mean? Why do they run in my head? My thoughts are all tangled.

[*Irina enters*]

OLGA. Be quiet, Masha. There's a good girl . . .
Let's go in.

MASHA [*angrily*] I shan't go in there. [*Sobs, but controls herself at once*] I'm not going into the house, I won't . . .

IRINA. Let's sit here together and say nothing. I'm going away to-morrow . . . [*Pause*]

KULIGIN. Yesterday I took these whiskers and this beard from a boy in the third class . . . [*He puts on the whiskers and beard*] Don't I look like the German master? . . . [*Laughs*] Don't I? The boys are amusing.

MASHA. You really do look like that German of yours.

OLGA [*laughs*] Yes. [*Masha weeps*]

IRINA. Don't, Masha!

KULIGIN. It's a very good likeness . . .

[*Enter Natasha*]

NATASHA [*to the maid*] What? Mikhail Ivanitch Protopopoff will sit with little Sophie, and Andrei Sergeievitch can take little Bobby out. Children are such a bother . . . [*To Irina*] Irina, it's such a pity you're going away to-morrow. Do remain another week. [*Sees Kuligin and screams; he laughs and takes off his beard and whiskers*] How you frightened me! [*To Irina*] I've grown used to you and do you think it will be easy for me to part from you. I'm going to have Andrei and his violin put into your room — let him fiddle away in there! — and we'll put little Sophie into his room.

The beautiful, lovely child! What a little girlie! To-day she looked at me with such pretty eyes and said "Mamma!"

KULIGIN. A beautiful child, it's quite true.

NATASHA. That means I shall have the place to myself to-morrow. [*Sighs*] In the first place I shall have that avenue of fir-trees cut down, then the maples. It's so ugly at night . . . [*To Irina*] That belt doesn't suit you at all, dear . . . It's an error of taste. And I'll give orders to have lots and lots of little flowers planted here, and they'll smell sweet . . . Why is that fork lying here on the seat? [*Going towards the house, to the maid*] Why is that fork lying on the seat, I say? [*Shouts*] Don't you dare answer me!

KULIGIN. Temper! temper!

[*A march is played off; they all listen*]

OLGA. They're going.

[*Tchebutikin comes in*]

MASHA. They're going. Well, well . . . Bon voyage! [*To her husband*] We must go home . . . Where's my coat and hat?

KULIGIN. I took them in . . . I'll bring them, in a moment.

OLGA. Yes, now we can all go home. It's time.

TCHEBUTIKIN. Olga Sergeievna!

OLGA. What is it? [*Pause*] What is it?

TCHEBUTIKIN. Nothing . . . I don't know how to tell you . . . [*Whispers to her*]

OLGA [*frightened*] It can't be true!

TCHEBUTIKIN. Yes . . . such a story . . . I'm



tired, exhausted, I won't say any more . . . [*Sadly*]
Still, it's all the same!

MASHA. What's happened?

OLGA [*embraces Irina*] This is a terrible day . . . I don't know how to tell you, dear . . .

IRINA. What is it? Tell me quickly, what is it? For God's sake! [*Cries*]

TCHEBUTIKIN. The Baron was killed in the duel just now.

IRINA [*cries softly*] I knew it, I knew it . . .

TCHEBUTIKIN [*sits on a bench at the back of the stage*] I'm tired . . . [*Takes a paper from his pocket*] Let 'em cry . . . [*Sings softly*] "Tarara-boom-deay . . ." Isn't it all the same!

[*The three sisters are standing, pressing against one another*]

MASHA. Oh, how the music plays! They are leaving us, one has quite left us, quite and for ever. We remain alone, to begin our life over again. We must live . . . we must live . . .

IRINA [*puts her head on Olga's breast*] There will come a time when everybody will know the reason for all this suffering, and there will be no more mysteries. But we must live . . . we must work, just work! Tomorrow I'll go away alone, and I'll teach and give my whole life to those who, perhaps, need it. It's autumn now, soon it will be winter, the snow will cover everything, and I shall be working, working. . . .

OLGA [*embraces both her sisters*] The bands are playing so gayly, so bravely, and one does so want to live!

Oh, my God! Time will pass and we shall forever be dead; they will forget our faces, voices, and even how many there were of us, but our sufferings will turn into joy for those who will live after us, happiness and peace will reign on earth, and people will remember with a good word and bless those who live now. Oh dear sisters, our life is not yet at an end. Let us live. The music is so gay, so joyful, and, it seems that in a little while we shall know why we are living, why we are suffering . . . If only we knew! if only we knew!

[The music has been growing softer and softer; Kuligin, smiling happily, brings out the hat and coat; Andrei wheels out the perambulator in which Bobby is sitting]

TCHEBUTIKIN *[sings softly]* "Tara . . . ra-boom-deay . . . *[Reads a paper]* It's all the same! It's all the same!

OLGA. If only we knew! If only we knew!

CURTAIN

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS



0 002 332 657 7 ●

F. RAY COMSTOCK AND MORRIS GEST

Present

BALIEFF'S CHAUVE-SOURIS

CENTURY ROOF THEATRE

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS



0 002 332 657 7